ALFRED
in the Chroniclers

BY

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'A HISTORY OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE,' 'ROMAN BRITAIN,' ETC.

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PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION.

I DESIRE in the following pages to present to English readers in a popular and readable form the early authorities for the life of King Alfred of England, which, interesting as they are, are for the most part scarcely known, save to professed students of history, and are in some cases hard to come by.

I give, accordingly, in full, his biography by Asser, his friend and chaplain, and such entries as relate to his reign in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the leading mediæval historians—Ethelwerd, Florence of Worcester, Henry of Huntingdon, William of Malmesbury, Simeon of Durham, Geoffrey Gaimar, Roger of Wendover, the Chronicle of St. Neot's, etc.

In each case I have made a new translation from the original, and have endeavoured, as far as possible, in my selections from each writer, to confine myself to such events as are narrated by him alone, or with some special colouring of his own ; for each, as a matter of course, made the freest use of the work of his predecessors, and almost invariably without one syllable of acknowledgment. But each adds his own touches to the story—touches which may well be founded on some floating tradition still surviving to his day. I have also prefixed to each a few words of critical notice, and when needful, a table of contents.

The Introductory Sketch will, I hope, show how the information derived from these various sources combines into an authentic picture of our hero-King. And this picture I would fain make yet more life-like by the extracts given from his own literary works, his laws, and the beautiful 'Proverbs of Alfred,' which record far-off echoes of his traditional wisdom.

EDWARD CONYBEARE.

CAMBRIDGE,
26 *October*, 1899.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

THIS edition has profited by the criticisms of my Reviewers, and has been revised in the light of Twentieth Century contributions to Alfredian biography. Amongst these I must acknowledge my special debt to Mr. Stevenson for his illuminating work 'Asser's Life of Alfred.' It also embodies the results of a careful and minute exploration throughout the whole Athelney and Edington district, which I have personally undertaken with a view to working out upon the spot the problem of Alfred's crucial 'Ethandune' campaign.

Like the first, this edition is intended to be essentially a popular, not a minutely critical work. Thus the notes are elementary in their character, and well-known names (Alfred, London, etc.) are given in their conventional spelling.

CAMBRIDGE,
March, 1914.

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N.B.—The whole of the above were originally written in Latin, with the exception of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which is an Old English, and Gaimar, who wrote in French.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE.

A.D.	ENGLISH HISTORY.	A.D.	CONTEMPORARY HISTORY.
		410	Capture of Rome by Alaric St. Augustine writes Orosius writes
450	[?] First Saxon settlement in Britain		
477	Ella of Sussex Bretwalda		
		500	Theodoric King of Italy
		520	Boethius writes
560	Ceawlin of Wessex Bretwalda		
		590	St. Gregory Pope
593	Ethelbert of Kent Bretwalda		
597	St. Augustine's Mission to England		
616	Rewald of East Anglia Bretwalda		
617	Edwin of Northumbria Bretwalda		
		622	Mahomet
634	Oswald of Northumbria Bretwalda		
642	Oswy of Northumbria Bretwalda		
658	Theodore Archbishop of Canterbury		
688	Ina King of Wessex		
		700	[?] English school at Rome founded
		711	Saracen conquest of Spain
731	Bede's History ends		
		732	Battle of Tours
755	Offa King of Mercia		
777	Mercian conquest of Wessex		
787	First Danish inroad		
794	Danish raid on Northumbria		
800	Egbert King of Wessex		
		800	Charlemagne Emperor
		814	Louis the Pious Emperor
		817	Partition of the Empire
823	Battle of Ellandune Egbert lord of South England		
827	Egbert Bretwalda and 'King of the English'		
		829	Second partition
832	Danish inroads renewed		
833	Danish raid on Dorset		
835	Danish raid on Cornwall		
836	Ethelwulf King of Wessex and Overlord of England Athelstan [St. Neot] King of Kent		
837	Danish raid on Hampshire		
838	Danish raid along East Coast	838	Third partition of the Empire
839	Danish raid on Kent		
840	Danish raid on Devon		

A.D.	English History.	A.D.	Contemporary History.
840	Battle of Charmouth		
		843	Fourth partition. Charles the Bald King of France
845	Danish raid on Somerset Battle of Pedredan		
		846	Saracens raid Rome
		847	Leo IV. Pope English School burnt down
849	Alfred born		
851	Danes first winter here (in Thanet) Sack of Canterbury and London Battles of Wembury, Sandwich, and Ockley Ethelbald King of Kent		
853	Ethelwulf subdues Wales Alfred sent to Rome		
855	Danes winter in Sheppey Ethelwulf's tithing and pilgrimage to Rome He marries Judith, and becomes King of Kent Ethelbald King of Wessex		
857	Death of Ethelwulf		
		858	Nicholas I. Pope
860	Ethelbert King Danish raid on Winchester		
861	Death of St. Swithun Alfred learns to read	861	Photian schism. Eastern churches cut off from Rome
865	Danes harry East Kent		
866	Danes settle in East Anglia Ethelred King		
867	Danes take York	867	Adrian II. Pope
868	Danes take Nottingham Alfred's marriage		
870	Great Danish raid Sack of Crowland, Peterborough, and Ely Battle of Thetford Death of St. Edmund		
871	Danes invade Wessex Battles of Englefield, Reading, Ashdown, Basing and Merton Death of Ethelred Accession of Alfred Battle of Wilton. Danes leave Wessex		
872	Danes in London	872	John VIII. Pope
873	Danes in Lindesey		
874	Danes conquer Mercia		
875	Danes on the Tyne and at Cambridge First English naval victory	875	Charles (the Bald) Emperor
876	Danes rush Wareham and Exeter Danish fleet destroyed at Swanage	876	Rollo settles in Normandy
		877	Louis (the Stammerer) Emperor

A.D.	English History.	A.D.	Contemporary History.
878	Danes at Gloucester and Chippenham Alfred in Athelney English victory at Kinwith Decisive battle of Ethandune Baptism of Guthrum Peace of Wedmore		
879	Danes at Cirencester and Fulham Eclipse of Sun	879	Louis III. King of France
880	Danes settle in East Anglia, or leave England	880	Danes invade Flanders
882	Sea-fight with Danes	882	Marinus Pope
883	Alfred's mission to India	883	Danes at Condé
884	Asser joins Alfred	884	Danes at Amiens. Charles (the Fat) Emperor. Adrian III, Pope
885	Danes attack Rochester Sea-fights at Stourmouth	885	Stephen VI. Pope
886	Alfred restores London. Overlord of England	886	Danes besiege Paris
		887	Danes at Chézy Arnulf Emperor
890	Death of Guthrum	890	Danes defeated in Britanny
893	Danes return to England. Hasting	891	Formosus Pope
894	Danes defeated at Farnham, Beamfleet, Buttington and Chester		
895	Danes defeated at Chichester		
896	Danish fleet captured in Lea Danes defeated at Bridgenorth	896	Boniface VI. Pope
897	Danish host breaks up	897	Stephen VII. Pope Romanus Pope
898	Danish pirates put down by Alfred's navy	898	Theodorus II. Pope John IX. Pope
900	[?] Death of Alfred	900	Benedict IV. Pope

ALFRED IN THE CHRONICLERS

PART I.

INTRODUCTORY SKETCH.

CHAPTER I.

Celtic and Teutonic ideals—Arthur and Alfred—Scope of the present work—English settlement of Britain—Gradual unification—Marks—Kinglets—Bretwaldas—Church of England—Bede's forecast.

§ 1. THROUGH the mist of long-past ages, two heroic names shine out as the special glory of our island, each the peculiar possession of one of the two branches of the Aryan family whose fusion has made Britain what it is. The Celtic ideal has embodied itself in the character of Arthur, the Teutonic in that of Alfred. And it is characteristic of the genius of the two races, that while the individuality of Arthur, as expressed in Cymric legend, is almost wholly mythical, that of Alfred, as handed down by Anglo-Saxon story, is almost entirely historical.

§ 2. 'He is a singular instance,' says Mr. Freeman, 'of a prince who has become a hero of romance; who, as a hero of romance, has had countless imaginary exploits and imaginary institutions attributed to him, but to whose character romance has done no more than justice, and who appears in exactly the same light in history and in fable. No other man on record has ever so thoroughly united all the virtues, both of the ruler and the private man. . . . A saint without superstition, a scholar without ostentation, a warrior all whose wars were fought in defence of his country, a conqueror whose laurels were never stained with cruelty, a prince never cast down by adversity, never lifted up to insolence in the hour of triumph'—there is no other name in history to compare with his.

§ 3. In the ensuing pages it is my object to set before my readers the original authorities on which this eloquent panegyric is grounded, to show Alfred as he lives in the pages of the early chroniclers; from his own friend and contemporary, Asser, to John of Wallingford, four centuries later. Each succeeding writer echoes those who came before, but almost every one adds his own touches to the story of his hero—touches which may perhaps be invention, but which also may, with at least equal probability, embody some floating tradition founded on historic fact.

§ 4. But in order to appreciate the lofty character thus delineated for us, we must have a clear conception of the extraordinary and appalling crisis of our history through which Alfred steered the fortunes of England. Never was nation nearer to utter shipwreck, never was the civilization of any land nearer being whelmed, hopelessly and for ever, beneath the inrushing deluge of barbarism, than when the helm was guided by his hand.

§. 5. That crisis was the outcome of a long series of events. Our Anglo-Saxon[1] forefathers had been now for 400 years the inhabiters of Britain. Four centuries had passed

'Since from the East hither
Angle and Saxon
Sped to this shore,
Over the broad brine,
Britain beseeking;
War-smiths wight, they
The Welsh overcame:
Earls ever-bold, they
The land made their own.'[2]

§ 6. And during that period they had been gradually laying aside the savage ferocity which marked their first onslaught, and which kept them in perpetual warfare not only with the Britons, whose land they were seizing, but amongst each

[1] This familiar compound is not found till Angles and Saxons became united under a common monarch.

[2] From the Song of Brunanburgh commemorating the victory of Athelstan over the Danes and Scots in Lancashire, A.D. 934.

other. At their first settlement the dwellers in each 'mark' (or parish) regarded every stranger entering their bounds as an enemy. But the impulse to coalition made itself felt almost at once, and ever more strongly as time passed on. Mark joined with mark under local kinglets ('proceres,' as Henry of Huntingdon calls them) whose sway embraced a whole district; the solidarity of each separate horde of invaders reasserted itself under a common chief, sometimes (as in the case of the West Saxons) the actual descendant of the original captain who led them across the sea, sometimes (as in that of the East Angles) merely the most prominent amongst the kinglets of the tribe. And ever and anon there rose into power, now from one tribe, now from another, one of those 'Bretwaldas' whom the popular voice informally acclaimed (by a play upon the word) as the 'Wielder of Britain,'[1] the quasi-Emperor to whom every tribe owed a vague but far from merely nominal allegiance.

§ 7. The idea thus suggested of a common Sovereign and a common political organization for the whole land became fixed by the manner in which the conversion of the English to Christianity developed itself. The loosely-knit system of the Celtic missionaries, whose preaching produced so vast an effect at first, could not, for all their fervour, hold its own in the English mission-field against the compacter energies of their earlier Roman rivals. The 'Italian Mission' triumphed, and every baptized Englishman found himself the subject of a world-wide and straitly-ruled spiritual kingdom, whose claims to his allegiance were held to override every local and every racial distinction. And not only so, but, by the disposition of the earthly Head of that kingdom, the Potentate whom he recognised as, beyond all others, 'the Vicar of Christ,'[2] he was further knit up with his fellow-countrymen in a narrower local bond which yet embraced all of his tongue

1 Etymologically the word simply connoted wider sway than usual. But *Bret* irresistibly suggested Britain.

2 The title was sometimes applied to a temporal sovereign.

and kindred. The ideal with which Gregory the Great sent forth Augustine, of a united British Church, including the whole island, and subject, under the Pope, to the Archbishop of Canterbury, was, indeed, never fully carried out; but that of Pope Hadrian, two generations later, of a united *Anglican* Church, was not entrusted in vain to the genius of Theodore of Tarsus, Archbishop of Canterbury 668 to 690, 'the first Archbishop,' as Bede tells us, 'whom the whole English Church obeyed.' Thenceforward every Englishman was a member of the Church of England. Clergy from every kingdom of the Heptarchy met in synod for common counsel and common regulation of their ecclesiastical interests, thus paving the way for a like solidarity of the realm in political affairs also.

§ 8. And with the spread of Christianity the bitterness of intertribal war was immensely softened. The shedding of Christian blood was looked upon as no light matter, and warfare more and more tended, not only to be less deadly, but to cease altogether. When, in 731, Bede concluded his 'Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation,' he thus depicts the striking progress of civilizing influences: 'The Picts have now made a treaty of peace with the English nation, and rejoice in being united in Catholic peace and truth with the Church Universal. The Scots that dwell in Britain,[1] content with their own bounds, neither plot nor conspire more against the English. The Britons, though they for the most part hate all English folk, and wrongfully, from wicked use, oppose the appointed Easter of the Catholic Church,[2] yet can in no way prevail as they would, the power of God and of man alike letting them. For though in part they are their own masters, yet in part also are they under English sway. Such being the

[1] The Scots migrated from Ireland in the sixth century A.D., and settled in Galloway. The Picts held all the land north of the Forth.

[2] The Celtic Christians merely differed as to astronomical minutiæ from the Catholic reckoning; but these often involved considerable practical divergence in the date of any given Easter. The Picts and Scots renounced these errors in 701, at the instance of Adamnan; but the Britons (Welsh) long persisted in them.

peaceful and calm state of the times, many lay aside their weapons, and incline . . . to monastic vows rather than . . . soldiership. What will be the end hereof the next age will show.'

CHAPTER II.

Earliest Danish troubles—The Heptarchy—Egbert, first King of the English —Egbert and Charlemagne—Defiance of Roman claim to Britain.

§ 1. WHEN Bede penned his forecast, he doubtless expected 'the next age' to perpetuate and develop the Christian civilization which gave so bright a promise. The event was different indeed; for it turned out to be the age of the last great inroad of Northern barbarians from which Christendom has suffered. Wildly-ferocious swarms of heathen pirates, arriving in never-ending succession from the inlets of Norway and Denmark, brought back to Britain all the horrors of the Saxon invasion, and made such havoc that the outlook grew dark and darker. Their black barks were first seen in 787, when, as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle narrates: 'This year . . . first came three ships of the Northmen, out of Hæretha-land [Norway]. And then the Reve [Sheriff] rode to the place, and would have driven them to the King's town, because he knew not what men they were. And then and there did they slay him. These were the first ships of Danish men that sought the land of Angle-kin.' [1]

§ 2. Again, in 794, after 'dire forewarnings over the land, mighty whirlwinds and thunderbolts and fiery dragons flying through the air,' we read that, 'on the 6th of the Ides of January [January 8] heathen raiders full piteously wasted God's Church at Lindisfarne, with rapine and slaughter.'

§ 3. This expedition was crushed the following year by aid of a tempest which cast away the pirates on the Northumbrian coast, and the daunted freebooters made no further attempt on our shores for a generation. And that generation witnessed, just in time, the long-delayed unification of England. Of the seven kingdoms which made up the so-called Heptarchy, three were Saxon. Two of these, Essex and Sussex, yet keep their

[1] This was the earliest name for England.

old name and their old boundaries, as counties; the third, Wessex, took in all the rest of the island (save Kent and Cornwall) south of the Thames. Three more were Anglian: Northumberland, from the Forth to the Humber, and from the Pennine Hills to the North Sea; Mercia, from the Humber to the Thames, and to the Welsh border; and East Anglia, containing Norfolk and Suffolk. And one, Kent, belonged to the earliest of all the English settlers, the Jutes.[1]

§ 4. In the incessant strife always bickering amongst these kingdoms, Wessex early absorbed Sussex and Kent. Essex, in like manner, was annexed by East Anglia, and both East Anglia and Wessex became for awhile subject to Mercia. But the wonderful year 800, which saw the coronation of Charlemagne as Emperor at Rome, witnessed at Kingston-on-Thames a humbler ceremony, which was destined to bring about yet more momentous results. On the ancient coronation stone of the West Saxon monarchs, still to be seen in Kingston Market-place, did Egbert, 'the uniter of the Heptarchy,' the grandfather of Alfred, take his seat (after three years' exile, at Mercian instance, in France) as King of the West Saxons.

§ 5. Little did those who took part in the acclamations which greeted him imagine that this tributary monarch of a few counties, occupying his position only by the sufferance of his Mercian overlord, was to be the founder of an empire destined to outlast that of the great Charles, and to extend its bounds incomparably further than his! Yet so it was. This petty under-King of the West Saxons worked his own way to be 'King of the English.' Three generations more, and his descendants were Emperors of Britain,[2] nor have the imperial claims of the British Crown ever been wholly lost sight of since. The imperial style, constantly adopted by our monarchs, is not, as is often thought, a mere turgid form of self-

[1] See Appendix A.

[2] This dignity was first attained by Edward, the heroic son of Alfred, in 924, and culminated in the coronation of Edward's great grandson, Edgar the Peaceful, as 'Basileus' of Britain, 973.

glorification, but expresses a historical and political claim of no small importance—the repudiation of the pretensions of Rome to political dominion in our island.[1] Nor is it by any mere figure of speech that we now speak of the British 'Empire.' For a dominion uniting under its suzerainty regions in every part of the earth, connected with it by ties of every degree of closeness, from the Isle of Man to Cyprus and Egypt corresponds more nearly to the original idea connoted by the word 'empire' than anything the world has seen since classical days.

§ 6. Such are the mighty consequences springing from the coronation of Egbert. Their first manifestation was, however, long in showing itself. Egbert, a statesman of no mean order, gave at first that highest proof of statesmanship—he knew how to wait. For twenty-three years he bided his time, and then suddenly shook off the Mercian yoke. One great victory (at Ellandune)[2] over the midland forces sufficed. Not only was Wessex freed, but the whole Saxon Name. 'The South Saxons, and the East Saxons, and the men of Kent and they of Surrey, came in unto him, for erst had they been wrongly forced from his kin. And the same year did the King of the East Angles and his folk seek wardship from King Egbert for dread of the Mercians.'[3]

§ 7. An attempt by the Mercians to regain their conquests led to the defeat and death of their King, Beornwulf, leaving the kingdom so weakened that, in 827, Egbert was able to subdue it, thus uniting under his sceptre all England south of the Humber. He was now acclaimed Bretwalda, the first Bretwalda since Oswy of Northumberland in 642.

§ 8. This assumption of an almost obsolete title is a striking proof of Egbert's statecraft. The name had been unheard for nearly two centuries, and the last three monarchs who bore it had all been Kings of Northumbria. To the dominion of

[1] So the statutes of 1534: 'This realm of England is an Empire . . . governed by one Supreme Head . . . having the dignity and royal estate of the Imperial Crown.

[2] Probably Ellingham, in South-west Hampshire.

[3] A.S. Chronicle, 823.

a King of Wessex the Northumbrians would never have submitted without a desperate struggle, which might well have tried Egbert's newly-built edifice of power beyond its strength. But when, as Bretwalda, he claimed their allegiance, and backed his claim by appearing with his full force on their border, they dared not resist.

§ 9. Had Charlemagne been still alive it might well have been otherwise. For his claims, as Roman Emperor, to the old Roman dominion over Britain had been acknowledged by the Northumbrian Princes[1] in their dread of subjection to the nearer power of Mercia. And even the great Offa, the most powerful of all the Mercian Kings, had not dared to violate the frontiers of the new Cæsar, though himself refusing to bow to him. An appeal for protection to their Augustus would almost certainly have brought a Roman army to the defence of the Northumbrians so long as Charlemagne was Roman Emperor. But Charlemagne was gone; the new Western Empire was divided amongst his worthless grandsons, and such outlying fragments as Northumbria had no chance of aid from any of them. The very fact that Egbert had ventured to call himself by a title which implied a claim to dominion over all Britain was in itself a defiance of the imperial counter-claim—a defiance which it was sufficiently plain that the imperial authorities were in no case to take up.

§ 10. Thus, without a battle, Egbert added Northumbria to his dominions, and now at last, in 828, took the new and loftier title, 'King of the English.'[2] No contemporary knew him as 'King of England,' for that name for our land did not come into use till the eleventh century,[3] and the title was

1 This is found in Eginhard, the biographer of Charlemagne, A.D. 808. See Palgrave, 'English Commonwealth,' i. 484, and Freeman, 'Norman Conquest,' i. 599.

2 In a charter of this year he first appears as 'Ecgberhtus gratia Dei Anglorum Rex' (Kemble, 'Cod Dip.,' i. 287).

3 The earlier name (see p. 6) was Anglekin. From the first invasion of Britain, if not earlier, our Teutonic forefathers (whether Angles, Saxons or Jutes) knew their race as a whole by the Anglian name. To the Britons, on the other hand, they were all alike 'Saxons,' as we still find in the Welsh and Gaelic 'Sassenach.'

first assumed by Canute. Our earlier monarchs derived their only territorial designations from their imperial sway over the whole island. Their charters describe them as 'Monarchus totius Britanniæ,' 'totius Albionis Archon,' 'Britanniarum Rex,' but in speaking of their kingship over their own kinsfolk it is always 'Anglo-Saxonum Rex,' 'Gentis Angligenæ Rex,' and such-like racial designations.

§ 11. Nevertheless, Egbert was, to all intents and purposes, King of England, and England was at last a single realm, able to confront, as a united whole, the coming tempest of the Scandinavian invasions. It was but just in time. Only four years later, in 832, the Danes came back, and from thence onward their attacks became unremitting.

CHAPTER III.

Danish invasions renewed—Sack of London—Battle of Ockley—First Danish settlements—Raid of 870—St. Edmund—Invasion of Wessex—Alfred succeeds to the throne.

§ 1. THE Viking attacks at first were mere plundering raids. Summer after summer saw a Danish fleet —a 'summer-lead,' as it was called—cross the North Sea, to ravage one district or another, never far inland, sometimes to be defeated, sometimes not, but in either event to make off, after an inroad of a few weeks, with their booty. The incomparably superior mobility of sea-borne troops as compared with land forces enabled them to choose their own point of attack, and, ere the hastily-summoned English levies could reach them, to pounce upon some undefended spot, or more than one, in quite another direction. Henry of Huntingdon[1] graphically describes the demoralizing effect of these tactics upon the English armies:

§ 2. 'Wonder was it, how, when the English Kings were hasting to meet them in the East, ere they could come up with their bands, a breathless scout would run in, saying, "Sir King, whither marchest thou? The heathen have landed in the South, a countless fleet. Towns and hamlets are in flames, fire and slaughter on every side." Yea, and that very day another would come running: "Sir King, why withdrawest thou? A fearsome host has come to shore in the West. If ye face them not speedily, they will hold that ye flee, and will be on your rear with fire and sword." Again on the morrow would dash up yet another, saying, "What place make ye for, noble chieftains? In the North have the Danes made a raid. Already have they burnt your dwellings. Even now are they sweeping off your goods, tossing your babes on their spear-points, dishonouring your wives, and haling

[1] See § 3.

them to captivity." Bewildered by such various tidings of bitter woe, both Kings and people lost heart and strength, both of mind and body, and were utterly cast down.'

§ 3. So things went on for twenty years, during which eight of these miserable summers, with their rapid, rushing invasions, are recorded, and then comes a further step. In 851 we meet in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle with the ominous entry: 'This year did the heathen folk, for the first time, bide over winter.'

§ 4. This was in the island of Thanet, the first permanent abode of the Anglo-Saxon invaders 400 years earlier. Both Danes and English seem to have realized the significance of this fact. The former were encouraged to reinforce their pioneers the next year by no fewer than 350 ships, ten times the average number of a Danish marauding expedition, and the greatness of the peril roused the English to a desperate effort of defence, which proved successful. The Danish crews, leaving their great mass of vessels at the mouth of the Thames, stormed first Canterbury, and then London—the only time in history that our Metropolis has ever been taken by assault—and then poured southward across Surrey. With the whole West Saxon force, Ethelwulf,[1] the son and successor of Egbert, and the father of Alfred, met them at Ockley, in their march along the ancient 'Stane Street' through the Weald. And there, beneath the old oak-trees[2] of the Sussex forest, 'made they the greatest slaughter among the heathen host that ever we heard tell of, even unto this day, and there gat they the victory.'[3] 'The warriors fell like corn in harvest . . . and God vouchsafed the victory to His faithful.'[4] 'Thus that self-same day did the Christians win a glorious victory. And they held the battle-stead; with hymns and praises giving thanks to God.'[5] To 'hold the battle-stead' or 'the death-stead' (*wealh-stowe*), *i.e.* to be in final possession

[1] An interesting relic of this King may be seen in the medal-room of the British Museum—a peculiarly-shaped gold ring with the word ETHELWLF (*sic*) on a ground of blue enamel.

[2] Ockley = Oak Lea.

[3] A. S. Chronicle.

[4] Henry of Huntingdon.

[5] Simeon of Durham.

of the field of battle, was. amongst the Anglo-Saxons, the accepted phrase for gaining the victory. So we still speak of winning the *field*.

§ 5. This was, however, but a momentary respite. The Danish raids continued, and in 855 the invaders again wintered in the land, this time in the island of Sheppey. In 860 'a mighty ship-host came to land and stormed Winchester,' and from this date onwards we read of '*the* host' of the Danes. They were henceforth always somewhere in the land, and more and more tended to form permanent settlements within its borders.

§ 6. The first of these was in East Anglia, a district in that day almost insular in character, accessible (from a military point of view) by but one narrow strip of down between the Cambridgeshire fens and the primeval forest which crowned the 'East Anglian heights.' And this strip, along which ran the Icknield Street, the ancient warpath of the British Iceni (the clan of Boadicea), was defended across its whole breadth, at this date, by two great ramparts—the Fleam Dyke, near Cambridge, and the well-known Devil's Dyke, near Newmarket.

§ 7. East Anglia thus formed a secure base for the sea-rovers, where 'their wives, their ships, and their wealth' could safely be left while they ravaged elsewhere. And their ravages were no longer confined to the sea-board of England. In 866 'they were horsed' (though whence they got all their horses in a land where these animals were commonly used neither for war nor husbandry is a most puzzling question), and burst forth from their East Anglian fastness for a four years' campaign through the very heart of the country. York fell, and Nottingham, and Peterborough, and Ely; Edmund, the saintly King of East Anglia, who had endeavoured, as it would seem, to raise a diversion in the rear of the pirates so soon as they left his realm, was defeated and martyred; and in 871 the Danes crossed the Thames at Reading, 'rushing like a torrent and carrying all before them,'[1] and poured with their whole force into Wessex itself.

1 Henry of Huntingdon.

§ 8. This year first brings Alfred upon the scene. First along with his brother, King Ethelred, who died in the thick of the struggle, then as King himself, he met the invaders in no fewer than nine pitched battles (besides innumerable skirmishes, 'which are not counted,' as the chronicler naïvely says), during this single year. The fortunes of the war changed from week to week; but finally the Danes, in spite of the arrival of a fresh 'summer-lead' to their aid, found it well to retire beyond the Thames, leaving the newly-crowned monarch a few years' breathing-space in his devastated realm.

CHAPTER IV.

Early life of Alfred—His claim to the Throne—Designation by Pope Leo—Saracen raid on Rome—Alfred at Rome—Judith, his stepmother—Devout childhood and youth—Friendship with St. Neot—Marriage—Alfred's 'thorn in the flesh.'

§ 1. ALFRED was at his accession twenty-two years of age. Born in 849 at Wantage, in Berkshire, the youngest of a band of five brothers, he speedily showed himself to be the flower of the flock. 'Beloved was he, by both father and mother alike, with a great love, beyond all his brethren; yea, and the darling of all. As he grew on stature, both in childhood and boyhood, so showed he ever fairer in form than any one of them, and in looks, and words, and ways the lovesomest.'[1] 'Bright was his face, so that all men marked it, and bright his talk.'[2] 'From his very cradle, above all, his own high-souled temper and high birth bred in him a longing after Wisdom. But, alas! through the carelessness of his up-bringers, he abode even unto his twelfth year, unable so much as to say his letters. Yet learnt he by heart many a Saxon lay; for day and night would he hear them repeated by others, and no dull listener was he. A keen huntsman also; ever at work on woodcraft, and to good purpose. For peerless was he in the hunting-field, ever the first and ever the luckiest; in this, as in all else, supremely gifted by God.'[3]

§ 2. As the cadet of the family, it might have been thought that he had little prospect of the Crown. But the English throne was not yet strictly hereditary. The appointment was by the popular voice, and any member of the royal house might thus be acclaimed King Nevertheless, to pass over the actual heir-apparent was unusual, and seems to have required

1 Asser. 2 Simeon of Durham.

3 Asser, § 27, where see Note.

some apology. It was done in Alfred's case, and his disappointed nephew, Ethelwald Clito, lived to give trouble a generation later; while the story ran that Alfred's claim had been authorized by the great Pope Leo IV. while he was yet a child. The tale, if true, is interesting as an early example of the Papal claim to supersede unworthy monarchs.

§ 3. For the situation arose thus. After Ethelwulf had crushed the Danes at Ockley, he made munificent thank-offerings to God, 'even to the tenth of all he possessed,' 'and established the same wont throughout all his realms.' Having thus formally established the system of ecclesiastical tithe—previously a loose and floating ideal in the Church of England[1]—he finally went on pilgrimage to Rome, whither he had already sent his youngest and best-beloved son, Alfred, then six years of age.[2] Amongst the Anglo-Saxons, infancy was computed to end with this year, and the rite of Confirmation was usually administered. Alfred thus received this Sacrament at the hands of the Pope himself, the Holy See being at this time held by Leo IV., the fortifier of the 'Leonine City,'[3] the deliverer of Rome from the Saracens, whose galleys were to Italy the same ghastly, ever-present horror which those of the Danes were to England. At this date the Mediterranean was practically a Saracen lake: its eastern, western, and southern shores were held by them; every large island within it was in their hands, and in 846 they had attacked Rome itself. When Alfred arrived there, the traces of this raid must still have been sadly perceptible in many a ruined church and desecrated shrine.

§ 4. While on his Roman pilgrimage, Ethelwulf committed the senile folly of marrying, in his fifties, a girl of thirteen—

[1] Up-to-date criticism will have none of this; holding that Ethelwulf only 'booked' for pious uses a tenth of the Royal Demesne throughout his immediate Kingdom of Wessex.

[2] According to both Asser and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle this was in 853, Ethelwulf's pilgrimage being two years later. Asser says that he then took Alfred 'for a second visit.'

[3] The Trans-Tiberine region of Rome, including the Vatican, is still known by this name.

Judith, the somewhat unprincipled daughter of Charles the Bald, King of France. This was a sad come-down from his first wife, Osburga, a true English lady, worthy to be the mother of Alfred, 'deeply devout, and keen of wit withal; great of heart as high in place.'[1] Leaving Alfred, as it would seem, at Rome, he returned with his bride to England, only to find public opinion so outraged by his wedding a foreign child, and giving her (in defiance of West Saxon custom) the title of Queen,[2] that his son and heir, an Absolom named Ethelbald, was all but able to organize a successful usurpation. Matters were patched up apparently upon the basis of father and son reigning together; but when, two years later, Ethelwulf died, Ethelbald seized not only his father's sceptre, but his father's widow. And, according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, it was on the news of this incestuous union reaching Rome that Leo 'hallowed Alfred to King.'

§ 5. What this phrase exactly implies is an unsolved problem. From a still extant letter of the Pope (in the British Museum) it appears that he had already, during Ethelwulf's life-time, invested Alfred with the insignia of a Roman Consul (at this date a purely honorary distinction somewhat freely bestowed). And William of Malmesbury tells us (on the authority of an old Latin poem) that Alfred passed on these very insignia (a red mantle, and a sword with a gemmed belt) to his eldest grandchild Athelstan, son of Edward, when the boy was of the same early age (about five) at which he had himself received them from the Pope. Athelstan was born 895, so that this must have been one of the very last actions of Alfred's life.

§ 6. But if Alfred thus condoned Athelstan's somewhat equivocal legitimacy, he himself was far from being an evil-liver in his youth. His early visit to Rome, with all its holy recollections—the lamps burning before the shrines of the Apostles at his father's charge, the English School[3] rebuilt by his father's devotion, his own special intercourse with the

1 Asser, § 16. 2 *Ibid.*, § 4. 3 See Appendix B.

'Universal Apostolic Pontiff'—had left an indelible stamp on his spiritual being. The spell of Rome was upon him.

§ 7. As soon as ever he could read, at twelve years of age, he made it his first task to learn by heart 'The Daily Course; that is, the Services of the Hours,' so as to be able to take part in the sevenfold scheme of daily devotion set forth in the Breviary of the Catholic Church.[1] His next was to commit to memory in like manner 'certain psalms and prayers, written out together in a little book which he bare day and night in his bosom . . . to aid his devotions amid the stress and strain of his life.'[2]

§ 8. And from the first he set himself to 'keep under his body and bring it into subjection.' To this end, in the fervour of enthusiastic boyhood, 'oft would he rise in the morn at cock-crow, and go to pray in the churches and before the relics of the saints. There would he prostrate himself on the ground, and pray that God in His mercy would stablish his heart yet more in His service by some infirmity, such as he might bear, but not such as would render him imbecile and unequal to his work in this world.' His prayers 'after long time' were heard, and he became subject 'from his childhood onwards' to a painful and mysterious ailment, which aided him to keep in check the temptations of youth.

§ 9. And when he was yet but seventeen he fell under an influence destined to foster his better self to the utmost. For in the year 867 we first find mention of Alfred's devotion to St. Neot. The individuality of this saint has been a matter of some controversy; but the most probable conclusion is that he was none other than Alfred's own eldest brother, Athelstan, who in 851 renounced the Crown of Kent (then the usual appanage of the heir-apparent of Wessex),[3] and betook himself to religion at Glastonbury. After seven years there, he went on to Rome, and on his return presided over an abbey of his

[1] The word 'Breviary' is not found before the time of Hildebrand, but the system can be traced to the earliest days of the Church.

[2] Asser, § 28.

[3] In the A.S. Chronicle we find him King of Kent in the earlier entries for 851, but his brother Ethelbald in the later.

own in Cornwall, and seems, until his death in 876, to have been the most special friend and counsellor of Alfred. And he remained the object of unforgotten reverence, not only to Alfred himself, but to his heroic son and daughter. When the latter delivered Mercia from the yoke of the Danes, she called one of the fortress towns which she founded on the Ouse to keep them in check, 'St. Neot's'; and the former christened after this sainted uncle his own eldest son, Athelstan, afterwards Athelstan 'the Magnificent,' the mighty King of the English and Emperor of Britain.

§ 10. By St. Neot's counsel, presumably, Alfred, on his betrothal (at nineteen) to a Mercian lady of high degree, prayed that the Lord would change his 'thorn in the flesh' for some other malady, as effectual, but less grievously incapacitating. His prayer was heard—his early complaint vexed him no more; but on the very day of his wedding he was seized by an access of ghastly pain, so that all the wedding-guests were filled with wonder and pity. 'Many thought that this came through the malice of the devil, who ever grudgeth at the good'; but the general opinion held it to be due to the evil influence ['*favore et fascinatione*'][1] of the admiring looks bent from all sides upon the bridegroom; in accordance with the primitive popular superstition (found in every part of the world, and still surviving even amongst English rustics), that overadmiration is 'unlucky' for a young person. None, save Alfred and his sainted brother, dreamt that it was indeed a sign of God's favour—His answer to the victim's own prayer. The attack soon passed; but from that hour forward until the day of his death Alfred was never secure from its recurrence, and a constant prey to the depression it left behind. Again and again it tormented him, 'and if ever, by God's mercy, he was relieved for a single day or night, yet the fear and dread of that horrible pain never left him, but made him almost useless, in his own thought, for every duty either to God or man.'[2]

[1] Asser, § 76. [2] Asser, § 79.

§ 11. Such was Alfred when, at twenty-two, he found himself called to the throne in the most desperate case that ever King knew. We may well believe, with Asser, that it was with the greatest reluctance that he accepted the place to which he had so long before been anointed, and which was now his 'by the grant of God and the goodwill of the land-folk, one and all.'[1] He might have had it, adds the biographer, before this, 'and that by the assent of all men,' for all that he was the youngest of his family; 'seeing that both in wisdom, and eke in all good ways, was he better than all his brethren put together.' But with characteristic meekness he waited his turn, and even now took up the regal duties in humble diffidence. 'For it seemed unto him that never might he, all alone, without one brother to aid, endure so grievous a stress and strain.' But with indomitable courage he set himself to overcome at once his own physical infirmity and the overwhelming onset of the heathen hosts. How nobly, how miraculously, he succeeded in achieving both conquests his subsequent annals relate.

[1] Asser, § 43.

CHAPTER V.

Outset of Alfred's reign—The nine battles of 871—Wessex cleared of Danes—Their settlements elsewhere—Alfred's early reforms—His wondrous versatility.

§ 1. THE first and extremest need was to clear Wessex of the Danes. The kingdom was all but at the last gasp. The heathen 'host' had entered the land with the vernal equinox, and entrenched themselves at Reading. Within a week they had fought one battle at Englefield with the English levies, and crushed them in another before Reading itself. The second week saw their own overwhelming defeat by Ethelred and Alfred on the slopes of Ashdown,[1] so dramatically told by the chroniclers, in whose pages we see the royal brothers assisting at Mass when the alarm of the Danish approach reached them. We see Alfred spring to his feet on the news and rush out to array his army, 'with such skill as the warrior Judas [Maccabæus] going forth to battle'; while Ethelred, refusing 'for any man on earth, to turn his back on Divine Service,' remained in church till the Mass was over. We see the 'dense phalanx' of the English under Alfred's charge, sword in hand, 'with the rush of a wild boar, up the hill against the foe; the shock of the two hosts 'with loud shouts' around 'the low lone thorn-tree'[2] upon the slope; the warriors falling on either side 'by fifties, by hundreds, and by thousands'; the mortal struggle turned at last by the decisive onset of the English reserves under Ethelred, 'sheathed

1 The whole range of the White Horse downs was so called. See p. 103.

2 Asser, § 40.

in armour and in prayer,'[1] cutting down two Danish leaders with his own hand,[2] and putting the whole horde to a panic flight, in which most of their other chieftains fell, 'with many thousand heathen' more, 'covering with their corpses the field far and wide.'

§ 2. Yet within a fortnight they had rallied, and could win in another desperate fight at Basing, and now it became a harder task to raise forces to resist them. The best and bravest of Wessex had fallen, and two months passed before the brothers could face the invaders again—to be again beaten at Merton, in Surrey, and Ethelred mortally wounded. While he was dying at Wimborne, in Dorset—so far westwards had the English been driven—came a new and exceptionally strong Danish 'summer-lead' to join their comrades at Reading. And now the fortunes of England seemed desperate indeed. It was but 'a small band' that Alfred could bring to follow him in the forlorn hope with which he dashed against the united hosts of the heathen at Wilton, in the first month of his reign.

§ 3. The odds were too great, and the Danes won yet again. But so desperate had been Alfred's onset, 'so rough the English hand-play,'[3] and so doubtful the fight, that they were fain to enter into negotiations, and to make peace with the young King, on the sole condition of withdrawing from his own immediate realm of Wessex. This, of course, meant that they were left free to work their will in the dependent kingdoms—Mercia, East Anglia, and Northumbria. It was a sad necessity, but there was no help for it. London itself had to be given up to the enemy, and Alfred had to look on at the dethronement of his brother-in-law, Burghred, the last King of Mercia (who died in exile at Rome), and the establishment of Danish settlements all over England north of the Thames. The termination 'by' (the Scandinavian equivalent for 'burgh') in Derby, Whitby, and many another town and village, marks to this day the districts where the new invaders

[1] Simeon. [2] John of Brompton. [3] Simeon.

set themselves down most thickly and most permanently on the land.

§ 4. Thus passed four miserable years, during which we hear nothing of Alfred. But we may be sure that his chief task was to make such improvement as was possible in the wretched state of demoralization which the Danish invaders had left behind them in his own Wessex. 'Great trouble and vexation had he with his folk who would take little or no pains for the common need of the realm. Yet, all alone, stood he, by God's help, at the helm of the kingdom; even as a master helmsman setteth him (though his sailors be weary and idle, almost all) to bring his ship safe unto the haven. Even so suffered he in himself no fainting nor wavering amid the many eddies and tide-ways [*fluctivagos*] of this world. His Bishops, his Aldermen . . . and his Sheriffs [*præpositos*] (to whom, after God and the King, the sway of the realm seemeth meetest to be entrusted), did he bend to his will, and bind to the common weal, by gentle teaching, by kind attention [*adulando*], by exhortation, by command, and, in the last resort, by sharp punishment, and by showing in every way his loathing of their vulgar folly and obstinacy.'[1] 'Full oft was he vexed to the heart with the Princes and the Captains [*pentecontarchos*], and the whole perverse generation, because they would not follow out the ends on which he was bent.'[2] 'In all the whole realm the poor, save him alone, had few or none to champion them. For all the high and mighty of the land gave thought rather to the things of this world than to the things of God: yea, more greedy was each one among them of his own worldly gain than for the common weal. . . . Often perversely did they strive together in the very session of his judges and Aldermen, insomuch that scarcely would one among them allow the justice of the award of the magistrates, and . . . all appealed to the King's own judgment. But were any conscious of unright in his cause, he, though by law bound to go before the King, yet with his own consent

1 Asser, § 115. 2 Simeon of Durham, § 53.

never would he go. . . . For well he knew that in the King's presence no whit of his wrong-doing could be pleaded for a moment: nor marvel was it, for the King, in awarding sentence as in all beside, was a most keen searcher out of truth. Himself did he inquire into almost all the judgments given . . . throughout all his realms . . . and, did he perceive iniquity therein, he . . . called unto him the judges, and asked them mildly why they had judged thus wrongfully, whether through ignorance or malevolence, whether for love or fear of any, or through hatred, or from greed of money.

§ 5. 'And, at length, if they acknowledged that they had given these judgments because they knew no better, then did he discreetly and temperately reprove their ignorance and folly after this sort: "Wonder, truly, is it to me of your rashness, that whereas, by God's grace and mine, ye hold the state and office of the wise, ye forget to study and work wisdom. Either then do ye at once forego the . . . offices ye hold, or strive ye more earnestly to study the lessons of wisdom. Such is my behest."

§ 6. 'At these words would the judges and officers tremble, and strive to give all thought to the study of justice; so that, wondrous to tell, almost all his Aldermen, Sheriffs and Thanes, though unlearned from their cradles, set to work at letters with a will; choosing the rather to be at the pains to learn unwonted lessons than to resign their functions. But if any, from age or slowness of wit, could make no speed in the liberal studies, then bade he his son, if he had one, or a kinsman, or, if none else might be had, his own freedman or thrall . . . to recite Saxon books before him day and night, whensoever leisure served. And with deep sighs did they lament from their inmost heart that in their youth they had taken no heed to such studies.'

§ 7. This vivid sketch is from Asser's eloquent summing up of his life of Alfred; and it must be specially applicable to these early years of his reign. These years, too, must have seen the beginnings of those many-sided developments

which marked his tenure of the throne beyond that of any monarch before or after. Not only did he, 'amid the trammels of this present world . . . and his own infirmities' thus diligently perform his regal duties, but he also 'practised constantly hunting of every kind, himself training his falconers and dog-keepers; himself did he teach his workmen in gold and silver and all cunning work beside, building houses stately and good beyond all his forefathers. Himself did he teach his folk to recite Saxon books, and above all did he learn by heart Saxon songs, and made others learn them; nor for his own part did he ever cease from studying most diligently and with all his power. Daily did he attend the Mass and other Offices of Religion: instant was he in psalm-singing and in prayer at the Hours, both of day and night To the churches also would he go in the night time secretly and unbeknown to his Court-folk. Unto Holy Scripture was he ever ready to hearken, and would have his own home-born folk read it unto him. And with outlanders no less would he join in prayer, if reason was; and to strangers from far would he give alms even as to his own folk. Courteous was he of speech, and pleasant to all, and wondrous eager to search into things unknown.'[1]

'Often and often would he repeat to himself by heart these lines [of Boethius]:

'Though ruin on ruin
Be heaped through the world,
Though on by the wild wind
The billows be hurled,
Thou, stablished in quiet,
Thou, happy and strong,
Mayst smile at the tempest
Through all thy life long.'[2]

1 Asser, § 81. 2 Simeon of Durham.

CHAPTER VI.

Great Danish inroad of 876—Siege of Wareham—Capture of Exeter—Danish fleet destroyed at Swanage—Alfred the founder of our navy—Danes at Chippenham—Wessex wholly overrun—Alfred unpopular—Danish massacres—Alfred in Athelney—His jewel.

§ 1. BUT the working out of this brilliant promise had to wait for better times. All too soon did the first brief breathing-space of Alfred's reign come to an end, in a more fearful struggle than even that which preceded it. The mighty host of the Danes, after leaving Wessex at the end of 871, made their head-quarters for a while in London. The next winter found them encamped on the Humber, the next at Repton, in Derbyshire. The intervening summers were congenially spent in their wonted ravages, and in the third (874) another great reinforcement reached them from overseas under three Kings, 'and they became invincible.'[1] Organized resistance, indeed, seems to have wholly ceased, and they now ventured to divide their forces, the original host invading Scotland, while the new-comers settled themselves at Cambridge.

§ 2. Yet another year, and the Danes 'thinking it scorn'[2] that any part of England should remain to Alfred, or more probably having squeezed their immediate neighbourhood dry and scenting better plunder in his comparatively unexhausted realm, made a sudden dash on Wessex. 'Stealing away'[3] from Cambridge (Florence adds 'by night'), a forced march enabled them to surprise the strong fortress of Wareham in Dorset. Beset there by Alfred, 'they sware unto him that they would depart from his land.' The oath was made 'on their holy armlets,' a pledge so sacred that 'never before would they do so to any nation.' What this 'armlet' (*beacg*) was. is uncertain. We know that, in Iceland, the Norsemen kept a holy ring in

[1] Asser. [2] Henry of Huntingdon. [3] A.S. Chronicle.

their temples by which they swore;[1] but this would be unavailable abroad. It is possible that the 'holy armlet' was one of those 'bracteates' in use among the Scandinavians of that age, brought from the East, inscribed with the zodiacal signs and with Arabic or sham-Arabic lettering. For freebooters to have some special oath which alone was regarded as binding remained a practice uutil quite recent days. Sir Walter Scott mentions it (in 'Waverley') as still current in the eighteenth century.

§ 3. Sacrosanct, however, as was this ceremony, it proved a mere blind, and one only too successful, to put the English off their guard. The very next night 'that perjured host' made a desperate sortie, cut their way through the Saxon leaguer, and, pushing westwards in all haste, rushed the unprepared garrison of Exeter. This treason led to a well-merited hanging of the hostages left in Alfred's hands as security for the treaty, and further led to the destruction, by the winds and an English squadron, of no fewer than 120 Danish vessels, which tried to effect a landing at Swanage in support of the invasion. It was doubtless by preconcerted arrangement with these expected allies that the host from Cambridge had struck for so remote a place as Wareham.

§ 4. Great as was the immediate importance of this naval triumph, it is of far greater historical moment as marking the very first outset of the flag of England upon the seas For amongst the many deep debts which we owe to Alfred, the very greatest, perhaps, from a national point of view, is his creation of our navy. And this creation was absolutely his own.

§ 5. For many a long year the English had ceased to be seafaring folk. Few developments in history are more startling than the effect of their occupation of Britain upon the Saxon pirates. After being for centuries the scourge of every coast, their ravages suddenly cease to meet us, and the conquest of our island so entirely absorbs the whole energies of

1 Arngrim Jonas, 'Rerum Islandic.,' i. 7.

the race that the sea knows them no more. All the long struggle with the Britons, and amongst themselves, which makes up their history for nearly 400 years, was wholly waged on land; we never hear of a sea-fight. Nor for all that time did any hostile fleet ever threaten our shores.

§ 6. Thus when, at length, invaders from oversea did begin once more to pour into the country, the one thought of the defence was to meet and crush them on land. Though a hundred years has passed since 'the first ships of Northmen sought Angle-kin' in 787, the idea of meeting them on the water never seems to have occurred to anyone before Alfred, unless, indeed, it were to his brother and adviser, St. Neot.[1] It needed a wonderful power of rising above contemporary conservatism to perceive that England's true line of defence is not her coast, but the waves around it. So ingrained is that thought in our national consciousness now, after being acted upon all these centuries, that we are almost unable to realize how extraordinary a flash of genius was its first inception.

§ 7. And this was wholly Alfred's. Not one of the line of valiant Kings before him, his three brothers, his father, his grandfather, who, one and all, made so brave a stand against the Danes on shore, ever, like him, 'fared out to sea with a ship-host' to fight them on their own element. This he had first done in 875, the year before the victory off Swanage, when he had defeated a small Danish squadron and taken one ship. Doubtless it was the inspiriting effect of this little victory in their first attempt which encouraged our sailors to meet and break the much more formidable armament of 876.

§ 8. Who these sailors were is a further question. It must be remembered that Alfred had to begin at the very bottom. The thought was his only, and he had to find both the ships and the seamen to carry it out. Both must, at first, have been largely foreign; for neither English ships nor English seamen as yet existed. But there was no lack of adventurers,

[1] One MS. of the A.S. Chronicle makes St. Neot (Athelstan of Kent) fight 'on shipboard' in 851; but the entry, if correct, stands absolutely alone.

Danish, Norse, Frisian, and what not, haunting the Channel, and quite ready to hire out their services. Some of these pirates we know that Alfred took into his pay to begin with; adding, doubtless, a detachment of English warriors to each crew. But more and more as he went on did his navy become wholly English. For he himself designed the ships, and had them built to his own plans, and himself trained the crews that manned them.

§ 9. Nor did Alfred's navy die with him. Throughout the reigns of his great descendants, Edward, Athelstane, and especially Edgar, we find the English fleet a most important factor in the national polity. And ever since, whenever the Government of our country has been in able hands, then has England been strong upon the waters; so strong that she has actually claimed the empire of the seas. From the reign of John to that of Victoria this claim was more or less made; and for three centuries at least (the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth) no foreign ensign might fly, even in peace, save by express permission, within sight of the flag of England. And what our fleet, with all its glorious traditions, all its uplifting effect upon the national heart, is to us now, we all know. But few remember that all this we owe to Alfred.

§ 10. The annihilation of the Danish fleet at Swanage produced an effect akin to that of the Battle of the Nile. The invaders' plan of campaign was simply ruined; the disappointed pirates were forced to make yet another truce with Alfred, with more oaths and hostages; 'and this time they kept it well.' But while most of them returned into Mercia, Exeter was still held, until in 878, 'during midwinter, after Twelfth Night,' the garrison 'stole away'[1] to take part in yet another secretly-planned and rapidly-executed invasion of Wessex. For ever fresh hordes of pirates had been pouring into Mercia over the North Sea, so that 'the number of the miscreants [*perversi*] grew day by day; and though thirty thousand were

1 A.S. Chronicle.

slain in one field, others, aye, twice as many, eftsoon took their place.'[1]

§ 11. 'The foul mob'[2] thus got together burst over the frontier and successfully effected a junction with their comrades from Exeter at Chippenham, 'and over-ran the land of the West Saxons and settled down therein,' 'covering the face of the earth like locusts, for none could stay them.'[3] 'Many of the country folk drave they beyond sea by force of arms and by lack of victual,'[4] probably to seek refuge amid the already Saxon population of Coutance and the Bessin. 'And of the rest the more part did they subdue and force to serve them, save King Alfred only.'[5]

§ 12. Both King and kingdom had evidently been taken completely unawares. All the early authorities leave the impression that there was no time to organize any resistance whatever before all was lost. A wholly inexact insertion in the late chronicle of John of Brompton speaks of a small and hasty English levy under Alfred himself as annihilated before the walls of Chippenham. And this may have been so.

§ 13. Moreover, the records not obscurely hint that Alfred had not at this time won the hearts of his people as he did afterwards. He was not yet 'England's darling.' We have seen how thoroughgoing a reformer he was; and reformers always earn, to begin with, more hatred than goodwill. Besides, he was a young reformer, and, we may well believe, carried out his reforms with the uncompromising severity of youth, and by methods overmuch lacking in conciliation. We may well, too, believe the story which tells us that this was no small vexation and anxiety to the King's friend and counsellor St. Neot, with his wider experience of bearing rule; and that the saint often warned Alfred in vain that this overweening course would assuredly bring after it disastrous consequences.

'But Alfred heeded not the reproof of the man of God, nor listed what he foretold. Wherefore (seeing that a man's sins

1 Asser. 2 Ethelwerd.
3 Henry of Huntingdon. 4 Asser. 5 A.S. Chronicle.

must needs be some way punished, either in this world or in that which is to come), the Righteous Judge and True willed that he should not be unpunished here, that so he might be spared hereafter.'

§ 14. The popular shortcomings which he had tried to level up are also given by the historians as reasons for this sore judgment:

'For in West Anglia . . . they had long lived in peace . . . which itself is no small incentive to vice . . . and gave themselves up to sloth and luxury . . . eating and drinking . . . . . even as the brute beasts. On them therefore came a brute beast in man's shape, King Gutrum, to wit, brutal and ferocious toward each and all, who with sword and axe wrought his bestial will. Nay, he spared not even such as . . . threw themselves at his feet. Neither old nor young, boy nor girl, mother nor maiden, spared he. . . . For his eye spared none. And piteous was the slaughter that might be seen. There lay they in each road and street and crossway—old men with hoar and reverend locks butchered at their own doors; young men headless, handless, footless; matrons foully dishonoured in the open street and maidens with them; . . . children stricken through with spears; all exposed to every eye and trodden under every foot. Some, too, there lay half-burnt within their half-burnt houses, not having dared to leave them; for they who were driven from their hiding-places by the fire perished by the sword.'[1]

§ 15. It is evident that the advantage gained by the invaders was utterly overwhelming. All Wessex was for the moment at their feet, save only the wild hills of Exmoor, with the yet more impenetrable marshes lying between the Quantocks and the Mendips.

This tract was well fitted by Nature to be the asylum of the vanquished. Already it had delayed for 200 years the westward sweep of the Saxon conquest, thus preserving the continuity of its great sanctuary, Glastonbury; (for ere the

1 John of Wallingford.

invaders passed the barrier they too were Christians, eager to revere rather than destroy the churches of the Britons), and preserving, moreover, to no small extent the continuity of its population. Once Christians, the English no longer simply massacred and enslaved; they recognised their vanquished foes as fellow-Christians, and merely held them in subjection, settling amongst them, intermarrying with them, and ultimately assimilating them. How much Celtic blood was still to be found in the district is shown by Asser giving the Welsh as well as the English name for almost every place he mentions thereabout.

§ 16. Hither then Alfred fled with a few faithful friends, making for the Isle of Athelney, a low, scant plot of firm ground, near the waters-meet of the Tone and the Parret, 'girded in with fen on every side, and not to be come at save by boat. Thereon is all dense alder-brake, full of stags and goats and such creatures, and in the midst one bit of open ground, scarce two acres.'[1] This fastness he made his chief place of refuge, whence he and his would sally out by twos and threes in quest of food, and to spy upon the enemy. Nay, sometimes in these wanderings the King found himself absolutely alone, as in the oft-told episode of the cakes in the cowherd's hut, and the equally oft-told occasion when he sought the Danish camp under the guise of a minstrel and thus learnt their proposed movements.

§ 17. Athelney, moreover, is the scene of the less-known tale which connects this last exploit with the name of St. Cuthbert, the renowned evangelizer of Northumbria:

'There had the King no sustenance save what he caught by fowling, hunting, or fishing. And at length it came to pass while his men were away fishing, and he was solacing his distress by meditating on the Scriptures, suddenly there stood beside him a pilgrim, begging alms in the name of God. Then did the kind-hearted monarch lift up his hands to heaven and said, "I thank my God that me, His beggar, He visiteth to-day

[1] For the story, see Asser, § 53.

in beggar's guise; that to-day He asketh back what He hath given, and requireth from me His own with usury." And quickly doth the King in his pity call his servant, who had naught but a little wine and one loaf, and . . . bids him give the half unto that beggar. The beggar thanks him, and in a moment, leaving no foot-print in the mire, vanisheth away. And, lo, the things bestowed on him were found untouched, as well the bread as the wine; and they who had gone a-fishing brought back an innumerable multitude of fishes.

'And when the King slept there appeared unto him one clad in pontifical robes, who warned him of his duties . . . and added: "O Alfred, Christ who hath beheld the uprightness of thine heart endeth even now thy troubles. For to-morrow shall there come to thee strong helpers, by whose aid shalt thou overthrow thine enemies." Then said the King, "Who art thou?" And he said, "I am Cuthbert. I am that pilgrim who was yesterday here, to whom thou gavest bread. Thee and thine take I beneath my care. Remember this when it shall be well with thee."'

'Thus, by the encouragement and monition of St. Cuthbert did the Most Christian King quit his lurking den, and by a device of rare wit, in the garb of a minstrel did he enter the Danish tents; and having spied out all he desired to see, turned him again to Athelney.'[1]

§ 18. Special interest thus attaches to the fact that at Athelney should have been found the only personal relic of Alfred, his famous 'jewel,' now in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. This is a sort of gold locket, some two inches long, the front being of crystal, through which is seen the figure of a man, rudely designed in gold and various coloured enamel. Though the design is rude, the workmanship is exquisite, and is a striking testimony to the much-praised skill of the English goldsmiths at this period. Round the edge of the locket (which is about half an inch thick) runs the inscription, in letters of pierced gold, AELFREDMECHEHTGEWYRCAN (*Alfred*

1 'Book of Hyde.'

had me worked). The figure has been variously thought to be intended either for our Lord, or the Pope, or St. Peter, or St. Cuthbert, or St. Neot, but is much more probably Alfred himself. A careful inspection will convince any artist that it is a portrait, and just such a portrait as we might expect Alfred's to be—a singularly set and resolute cast of countenance, bearing marks of severe suffering undergone and overcome. The face indeed is clean-shaven; but the idea that Alfred, as an ancient Saxon, must have worn a full beard is wholly modern and unsupported, and it is a pity that it should have been stereotyped on his monuments at Winchester and Woking. His coins show no beard. The full beard, indeed, has been throughout history never a long-lived fashion; the shave, clean or partial, being much longer in vogue. It is scarcely likely that the jewel dates from the time when he was in hiding at Athelney. It more probably formed part of the treasure belonging to the monastery which he there founded as a thank-offering after the tempest which drove him to shelter passed away.[1] On the site of this monastery now stand the buildings of Athelney Farm.

Athelney is to-day a small inconspicuous ridge of green meadow, some half mile in length by a furlong in breadth, raised but a few feet above the dead level of the surrounding flat. Till not so very long ago that flat was impassible swamp, even as in Alfred's day, for it lies well below the high water mark of the Bristol Channel, only a few miles away.

Express trains now fly past the Southern margin of this famous islet, on their way between London and the West, affording just a glimpse of it to the passing traveller. And the high road from Taunton to Glastonbury runs along its Northern marge. But the Pilgrims of Alfred whose devotion leads them to enter the Isle itself are richly repaid. For they find but little difficulty in conjuring up the scene as he saw it a thousand years ago. The view indeed from 'Alfred's

[1] The delicacy of the work is quite incompatible with the view that the Jewel was meant to be worn as a crest or borne on a banner-pole. It is most likely the handle of an *æstel*. See p. 62.

monument,' on the highest point of the Isle, is substantially the same to this day. The 'dense brake' on the island itself is now only represented by the lines of willows bordering the sluggish waterways around; but the main features of the landscape are quite unaltered.

There, to the North-West, is the long undulating line of the Quantock Hills, bounding the horizon, and matched, on the North-East, by the less picturesque summit of the Mendip range. Between these points can be seen, to the North, if the day is clear, the far blue mountains of Wales; while the near and well-wooded uplands of Somerset form the Southern limit of vision.

Immediately to the West this terra firma appoaches quite startlingly near to the extremity of Athelney, with scarcely a hundred yards of swamp between the island shore and the steep descent from the village of Lyng. In every other direction the level flat is the foreground of our view for miles. But between us and the Mendips rises, five miles away, the petty range of the Poldon Hills, making a show, over that level, quite out of proportion to their real height, which nowhere much exceeds two hundred feet. And between them and us again, the eye is at once caught, as Alfred's eye must constantly have been caught, by the steep 'mount' near Burrow Bridge, now called 'Alfred's Fort,' shooting up abruptly to a height of more than fifty feet, and crowned with its tiny ancient church of St. Michael, now in ruins. So small is this mound that some think it artificial; it is indeed little larger than many of the great Castle mounds *e.g.* at Thetford. But it is far more probably a natural jut of rock, such as there are several more of in the immediate neighbourhood. That at Aller, barely a mile away, is but one size larger. The triple rampart which girds 'Burrow Mount' *may* be Alfred's work; but is more probably prehistoric.

Such was, and is, Athelney, Alfred's Camp of Refuge; akin to the similar islets which, in the fens of Ely,

gained that name, by safe-guarding the last hopes of the English at the Norman Conquest, as of the Britons at the English Conquest. To natives at home in the net-work of water-ways running all-whither through the reeds and brakes around, such islets were indeed a place of security; for no stranger could dare to get himself involved in such a labyrinth.

And as, at Athelney, the eye still sees what Alfred saw, so is the ear greeted, if we converse with one of the neighbouring peasantry, by the sound which must have been so familiar to him in the first syllable of his own name;—that indescribable Old English vowel, between A and E, now lingering on only in the West. Modern writers sometimes endeavour to indicate this vowel by Æ, sometimes by Ae; and our conventional spelling represents it sometimes by A (as in Alfred and Athelney), sometimes by E, as in Ethelbert. But it is, in fact, none of these; only by being heard can it be realised, and, above all when it is heard at Athelney.

CHAPTER VII.

Danish defeat in Devon — The Magic Standard — Rising of Wessex—Decisive battle of Ethandune—Surrender of Chippenham—Baptism of Guthrum—Peace of Wedmore—Its results—Alfred's restoration of London.

§ 1. THE first gleam of returning sunshine came from the West. 'Now that King Alfred had neither land nor hope . . . the Lord looked down from heaven upon the remnant of His people.' A pirate fleet of twenty-three ships, which had wintered in South Wales, 'with much slaughter of Christians and burning of monasteries,' crossed the Bristol Channel, and at the vernal equinox poured 'like fierce wolves' into Devonshire. Almost at their landing, however, a sudden rally of the men of Devon cut off the entire force, at Kinwith near Bideford. The Hubba Stone, a huge barrow amongst the sandhills by the estuary (now swept away by the tide), enshrined for eight centuries the name and the bones of the pirate chief here slaughtered.[1] 'And there was taken their war-flag which they called The Raven'—a magic banner, held in the utmost reverence by the Northmen; 'for they say that the three daughters of Lodbrok [the father of Hubba] wove it, and that in one day. They say, moreover, that in every fight, whensoever that flag went before them, the Raven in the midst thereof, if they were fated to win the day, would seem to flutter as it were alive; but were their doom to be worsted, then would it droop still and lifeless. And oft was this well proven.'

§ 2. And, indeed, with the capture of this banner the spell of the long succession of Danish victories was now at last broken, and English hearts began to take courage. Alfred's sallies from Athelney were no longer mere foraging raids, but incessant attacks upon the flying parties of the Danish host, so

1 Such at least was the tradition. But see Gaimar, 3141.

effectual, and rousing such a spirit of local resistance, that the invaders were forced to concentrate. The country, being thus cleared, rose *en masse*, and it was 'the whole folk of Somersetshire and Wiltshire and Hampshire' who, at Whitsuntide, 878, greeted 'with joy and acclaim' the King whom all had thought dead. This was at Egbert's Stone, on the border of Selwood or 'Mucelwood' Forest, 'which being interpreted is in Latin Silva Magna, but in British Coitmawr.' The exact spot here indicated is matter of dispute. But the gathering place must be approximately indicated by 'Alfred's Tower,' which on the brow of King Settle Hill is so conspicuous a landmark from the West. And to those who know the ground it is hard not to see 'Iglea,' Alfred's next stage, in the towering summit of Cley Hill, near Warminster, which, crowned with its ancient camp, so strikingly dominates the road by which he must needs have marched to meet the Danes at Edington.

§ 3. And Alfred was not the man to let such a chance slip. That very day, while the enthusiasm roused by his reappearance was at its height, 'at peep of dawn roused he the camp,' and led, no small band this time but 'a mighty army,' against the foe. Two days more, and he had met them at Ethandune for the decisive battle, on which hung the fate of England. The numbers on either side seem to have been about equal. Doubtless the Danes were the better armed, being professional soldiers, while the English were only a *landsturm*. But, on the other hand, the former were doubtless as dispirited by the sudden turn of events as the latter were encouraged.

§ 4. Where this Ethandune (or Edington) was is hotly debated. The most recent authority, Mr. Stevenson, in his 'Asser,' inclines to Bp. Clifford's view that it was the Somersetshire Edington, only a few miles from Athelney. But this can hardly be, if, as he allows, the muster-place was near 'Alfred's Tower.' For the first object of the Danes on hearing of Alfred's muster would be to march southwards from Chippenham to crush him as speedily as possible. Alfred, on his side, was as keen to bring matters to an immediate issue,

and marched northwards on Chippenham. This would make the two armies meet about midway, at or about the Wiltshire Edington, near Westbury; where the White Horse, so conspicuous upon the hill side, may possibly be a memorial of the battle. This Edington is some 15 miles from 'Alfred's Tower,' and 12 from Chippenham.

§ 5. The event is thus graphically described by Simeon of Durham:

'With the first bright rays of the rising sun, did the King alike and all the flower of his folk beclothe themselves in their war-gear,—with the threefold breastplate, to wit, of Faith, and of Hope, and of the Love of God. Arising thereafter from the ground, boldly did they challenge the combat, trusting full surely in the mercy and loving-kindness of the Creator, and safe-guarded, as with a rampart, by the presence of their King, whose face shone even then with light as it had been the face of an angel.

'All the long day did the two peoples fight; and far off might you hear the shouting and the crash of arms. And He who in His might beholdeth all things, beheld also the inmost wish of His King on earth, and granted him his heart's desire—the prayers and the aid of the powers of heaven. Thus at length laid he low his foes, and gat him the victory, giving thanks to his heavenly Saviour with joy of heart.'

§ 6. From the Chronicle of St. Neot's we learn that the supernatural aid on which Alfred's heart was thus set was that of St. Neot himself, the dear brother and counsellor of whom death had the year before deprived him. We read that ere his departure the saint had promised that as he had been Alfred's spiritual guide in life, so should that spiritual guidance and wardship still abide with him. 'Thy guide have I been ever; thee and thine will I lead on.' 'I will be thy captain, I will be thy champion; thon shalt be glad and rejoice in me.' 'Lo, I will go before thy banner'; 'thine enemies shall perish at my presence.'[1]

1 'Chronicle of St. Neot.'

§ 7. And now the King was persuaded that this promise was being fulfilled. With the eye of ardent faith he beheld the blessed spirit of his brother leading on the Christian banners to the onset. 'See ye not?' he exclaimed to his men; 'see ye not? That is indeed Neotus, Christ's glorious servant, Christ's unconquered soldier, and through him is the victory even now given to our hands.'

§ 8. The Danes, in fact, were utterly worsted, and sent flying back, in headlong rout and with heavy loss, to their entrenched camp at Chippenham. Here they at once found themselves completely invested by the pursuing English, who 'with blow on blow followed hard after them,' and wholly unprovisioned for a siege; for 'every living thing without the stronghold, flocks and herds and horses and all, caught we and took' ere they could be brought in. Neither assault nor sally seems to have been made. Alfred knew that the enemy must shortly surrender unless they cut their way out; and this they were too demoralized by defeat even to attempt. Thus we only read of exultation on the one side, and craven dejection on the other. 'Then did the King and his hosts stand by, all smiling with joy of heart; but the remnant of the foe, cried ever aloud for sorrow of heart, and for bitter hunger, and for cold, and for mighty dread. "Mercy," do they implore, "mercy," "mercy and peace"—they who had ever been enemies unto peace, of direst mood.'[1]

§ 9. And to peace, after a fortnight, they were admitted; on conditions which show to what a strait they had been brought.

First, they were to give the King as many hostages as he pleased, receiving none in return, 'in which form they had never before made treaty with anyone.'[2]

Secondly, they were immediately to depart the kingdom.

Thirdly, their leader, Guthrum was to become a Christian and receive baptism without delay.

On these terms the humiliated Danes left Chippenham, and betook themselves to Cirencester, over the Mercian

[1] Simeon of Durham. [2] Asser.

border. And a few weeks later Guthrum did indeed present himself for baptism at Wedmore, on the Poldon Hills; when Alfred, as his godfather, gave him the Christian name of Athelstane, after the sainted brother (St. Neot) whose warnings and whose promises had alike been so signally fulfilled in Guthrum's attack and Guthrum's defeat. 'And thus did King Alfred receive him for his own son by adoption.' 'And his spiritual father gave unto him many a fair gift—yea, and unto all his comrades, as many as were fain to receive the Christian faith.'

§ 10. This baptismal visit of Guthrum to Alfred was a political epoch of the very first importance. It established between them a tie which the Danish chief, fierce pirate as he was, never forgot. Henceforward, whatever other Danes might do, his influence, the mightiest amongst them, always made for peace with his godfather, and he himself never broke it. Nor only so. Alfred's statecraft took occasion at this interview to establish with the Danes a permanent understanding. By formal treaty he bound them to evacuate not only Wessex, but half Mercia also. Their boundary was to be the river Lea from its mouth to its source, then 'right to Bedford,' and along the Ouse to the old Roman Watling Street, leading straight as a line from London to Chester. Beyond that, northward and eastward, all was to be the 'Danelagh.' In this district Danish law was to prevail, and Guthrum and his chieftains might set up whatever local polities best suited them. But all were to recognise the West Saxon King as lord paramount.

§ 11. And all were to observe strict and equal justice betwixt Englishman and Dane. The wer-gild, or fine payable for manslaughter, was to be the same for each, '8 half-marks of pure gold' (equivalent to about £50 or £60) and upwards, according to the rank of the slain man. And a common procedure was to regulate all matters of dispute between members of the two nationalities.

§ 12. The effect of this Peace of Wedmore was to do away for good with the whole system of English under-kings. The

royal lines, indeed, of Mercia, Northumbria, and East Anglia, had all alike become extinct. That of Wessex, the oldest of all, alone was left; and henceforward its subsidiary realms, Mercia, Kent, and Sussex, were assigned not to Kings, but, like shires, merely to Aldermen. To the Alderman of Mercia Alfred gave in marriage his own daughter Ethelfled, whose claim, after her husband's death, to be 'Lady of the Mercians' was of such vast moment in that re-conquest of the 'Danelagh' which was the glory of the reign of her great brother, Edward the Elder.

§ 13. And, with her, Alfred gave over to her husband's wardship the newly rebuilt city of London. The place had been utterly wasted by the Danes, 'the town burnt, and the townsfolk slain, . . . scattered far and wide, or brought in bondage to the heathen.' The old Roman walls were doubtless still standing, but breached and ruinous; and the old Roman centre of Britain, from which every road of theirs radiated, had become a dreary, flame-scorched waste, without inhabitant.

§ 14. It is possible that this may have been so once before, after the English conquest four centuries earlier; but as we read that the last British Bishop of London only fled from his see shortly before the coming of Augustine, this is scarcely probable. London, it is more likely, lived on through all the troubles which marked the end of Roman Britain, surviving, though with much diminished dignity, first as the capital of the Middle Saxons, afterwards as one of the leading towns of the East Saxons, from whom it was finally taken by the Angles of Mercia.

§ 15. Now, Alfred's genius for warcraft and statecraft saw the unrivalled strategic and political advantages of the site, and started London anew in her career of greatness. According to some of the chroniclers, he took the place by force from the Danes, who had drawn off most of their garrison here to aid their great siege of Paris; but the earlier authorities tell us only of the work of restoration. 'Worshipfully did he build again the place . . . that men might dwell therein and have it

in possession.' These men were, to a great extent, the old inhabitants, 'both Angles and Saxons' (the former representing the comparatively new Mercian element in the population), 'who before were scattered far and wide, and who now 'freely came in unto the King, and bowed them to his sway.'

§ 16. The event fully justified Alfred's intuition. The importance of London—as the lowest point for many a long mile, where a defensible bridge across the Thames was possible—manifested itself at once. Over and over again in every subsequent inroad the city checked the Danes, nor could they ever again take it. Indeed, it never has since been taken. It waxed ever greater, and in less than three centuries from the date of its restoration by Alfred had vindicated its claim to be the undisputed metropolis of all England.

§ 17. How much did anyone at the time, even Alfred himself, foresee of London's future greatness? But little, probably. Nevertheless, his restoration of the city was evidently felt at once throughout the whole land as an event of the very first importance. It made his claim to be not only King of Wessex, but, like his grandfather Egbert, Overlord of England, a reality. 'Unto him,' says the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle here, 'turned all Angle-kin'; and henceforth we find him exercising authority, not only in his own Wessex, but in every part of the land not immediately under the Danes;—in the mountains of Wales,[2] in the wilds of Northumberland,[3] and in the fens of Ely,[4] where he is said to have set up a little college of priests amid the ruins of Etheldreda's famous abbey, ruined, liked the rest thereabout, in the great Danish raid of 870. This great national event—the rebirth of our capital—took place in 886. It is noteworthy that never after that date do the contemporary authorities call Alfred by the title, used up to 885, 'King of the West Saxons'; henceforward he is 'King of the Anglo-Saxons,' or even 'King of the English.'[5]

1 William the Conqueror, when unable to force London Bridge, had to go up the river as far as Wallingford before he could find another crossing-place.

2 Asser. 3 Roger of Wendover, § 13. 4 'Liber Eliensis,' i., § 41.

5 A coin of Alfred figured in the British Museum Catalogue (ii. 34) is inscribed REX ANGLO.

CHAPTER VIII.

Subsequent Danish wars—Great invasion of 893—Military genius of Alfred—Campaigns of 894, 895, 896—Battle of Farnham—Danes at Chester—Danish fleet taken—Alfred's ships.

§ 1. NOR, so long as Guthrum lived, had Alfred any further serious trouble with the Danes. Though shortly after the Treaty of Wedmore a large pagan fleet entered the Thames and wintered at Fulham, they found no support from the men of the Danelagh, and sailed away, without attempting mischief here, to ravage Flanders and France, and to be repelled from Paris by the noble devotion and energy of St. Genevieve. Some of the more turbulent spirits from Guthrum's following seem to have accompanied them; remembering, we may well believe, the vision[1] of empire which, three years earlier, had led their old comrade, Rollo 'the Ganger,' across the Channel,—to become in due time (A.D. 905) the first Duke of Normandy. A petty raid, by four ships only, was vainly attempted in 882; and a more serious inroad, which stirred up a ferment amongst the East Anglian Danes, was nipped in the bud by prompt naval and military action in 885; but not till 893, when Guthrum was dead, and the Danelagh breaking up into a disorganized mass of petty Danish holdings, were the free-booters able to push any invasion home.

§ 2. In that year, however, 'the mighty host came back from the East Kingdom,[2] west to Boulogne, and there took they shipping, so that they came over at one crossing, horses and all, and they came to land at Limenemouth, with 350

[1] See John of Brompton, § 22.

[2] *I.e.* the German kingdom of the East Franks, whose King was also usually Emperor. The Empire of the West was divided at this time into three parts: the East (roughly = Germany), the West (roughly = France), and the Middle Kingdom (the valleys of the Rhine and Rhone), usually called Lotharingen (Lorraine) after its first King, Lothaire, grandson of Charlemagne.

ships. This inlet is in the eastern part of Kent, at the east end of the great weald which is called Andread.[1] The weald is in length 120 miles, from east to west, or longer, and 30 miles broad, and the river Limin flows out of the weald. On this river they towed their ships as far as they might, four miles from the outer mouth, and there stormed they a stronghold. Within that stronghold were but few men posted, and they but churls, and in part only was it finished. Then soon after came Hasting, with 80 ships, to Thames mouth, and wrought him also a stronghold at Middleton, on the south side of the Thames. And the other host did the like at Appledore.'[2]

§ 3. And this formidable inroad—the most formidable in point of numbers that England had seen since the Battle of Ockley,[3] forty years before—was supported by treason at home. There was a general rising amongst the Danes settled in the land, 'and against their plighted troth, so oft as the other hosts raided forth, then raided they forth also, either with them or on their own count.'

§ 4. The crisis was acute, but the genius and energy of Alfred kept the situation well in hand. With true military instinct he had already provided against the great difficulty which besets the operations of a national militia acting against professional soldiery—the impossibility of keeping the former continuously embodied. The English levies were quite ready to rise at their King's summons, and to fight bravely beneath his banner in the field. But, the battle over, each man wanted to return to his home, and give an eye to his farm-work and his flock. After a few weeks at most, the *land-sturm* would disband, leaving the enemy to make the most of the occasion, and harry unchecked till a new array could be summoned to meet them. For the enemy, a horde of fighters always under arms, living on their plunder, were under no

1 So called from the chief Roman city of Sussex, Anderida, utterly destroyed at the English Conquest.

2 A.S. Chronicle.

necessity ever to lay aside their swords for ploughshares, or to rear flocks and herds for themselves; they preferred to carry off those of others.

§ 5. All this was grasped by Alfred as it had never been grasped before, and he created a way out of the difficulty which had all the originality and all the simplicity of true genius. During the fourteen years of almost continuous peace which the Treaty of Wedmore had given him, he had been diligently elaborating a workable scheme of national defence. He had organized the able-bodied men of every district in England into linked battalions, which in time of need were called out alternately, for some limited period, of probably two or three weeks' duration. When the summons came, every man in the country knew his place in this *landwehr*, and was ready to serve his time. Thus, the King was able to operate continuously against the foe, who, go where they would, found the English ready for them at every point. The result was triumphant: the hapless freebooters were allowed no rest, but were incessantly hustled from side to side of the land, like shuttles in a loom.

§ 6. Their first endeavour was to effect a junction between their two armies from Appledore and Milton, their common objective being London; now, since Alfred's restoration of the city, recognised as the key of England. Alfred, however, anticipated the design, and sent his son Edward, afterwards King, to occupy, at Farnham, a strategic position between the headquarters of the two pirate hosts. The Prince, thus acting on interior lines, was able, when they made their effort, to inflict decisive defeat, first on one and then the other, ere they could unite.

§ 7. Thus worsted in the East, their next attempt was to transfer the seat of war to the West. But those who went round by sea to Devon were there kept in check by Alfred himself; while those who, by a hasty dash up the Thames Valley, reached the Severn were rolled back again with heavy loss to seek a breathing-space in Essex. Finding none, they

made a forced march right across England, 'at one stretch day and night,' till they ensconced themselves in 'a waste chester in Wirrall, which hight Lege-ceaster.'

§ 8. This 'chester' was none other than Chester itself, the Roman Deva, which had lain waste ever since its destruction by Ethelfrith of Northumbria in 607, after the great battle in which he fulfilled Augustine's prophecy that if the Welsh would not help in converting the English, they would themselves suffer from their heathen ferocity. The city was then utterly depopulated, but, as was the case with most of the Romano-British towns, it was not occupied by the conquerors. To the genius of the early Teutonic mind, the idea of city life was alien. Like the great Earl of Douglas, they were 'fainer to hear the lark sing than the mouse squeak,' and an existence within stone walls was repulsive to them. Thus, when they took a Roman town, they sacked and burnt it, but left the site unheld for generations, sometimes, as at Anderida, even to this day. And they called the spot by a Roman name, *castrum*, Anglicized into 'caster,' 'chester,' or 'cester,' adding, if it had been a military station of note, a reminiscence of the fact in the prefix *Leg*, *i.e.* legion.

§ 9. Here for a short space the hunted Danes were able to rest, behind the old Roman walls still in part standing. But their repose was brief, and next spring, after eating their horses for hunger, they retired again to Essex, withdrawing their fleet also from Devon, and thus giving up their whole western design. Further heavy loss attended an attempted landing at Chichester, and when they reached Essex the survivors were so rash as to take their whole fleet up the Lea to Ware, twenty miles above the newly-rebuilt London. The little river must have been filled from bank to bank for miles with the warcraft—long black, clinker-built galleys of beautiful lines, light enough in draught to float in such a stream as the Lea, yet seaworthy enough to face the stormy waves of the North Sea and the Channel.

§ 10. Alfred's eagle eye saw the opportunity at a glance. He seized in force on both banks of the stream below them, and they found themselves hopelessly barred from the sea. There was nothing for it but to abandon the entire fleet, which was carried in triumph to London—'such ships as were steal-worthy,' and make yet another despairing rush westwards. Once again they were met and driven back, at Coatbridge on the Severn, and now they had had enough of it. 'Then did the host break up,' into a disorganized medley of small predatory gangs. 'And some went to East Anglia, and some to Northumbria, and Hasting and they with him crossed again the sea, without spoil and without honour, and so put in to Seine-mouth.'

§ 11. 'Thanked be God,' writes the Anglo-Saxon chronicler —and we may well believe that Alfred's own voice dictated the words—'this host brought not England to utter ruin'; a contemporary murrain among cattle and mortality among leading men being held much more serious calamities than the invasion. Nor did the Danes ever gather head again. A few pirate 'esks' tried to ravage the south coast next year (897), but they were easily overcome by the 'long ships' built by Alfred against them. 'They were full nigh twice as long as the esks; some had sixty oars, some more; they were both swifter and steadier, and eke higher than the others. They were shapen neither after the Frisian fashion, nor yet the Danish, but so as it seemed to the King they would best profit.' The pirate crews were justly hanged; and after this no serious Viking invasion troubled the land for nearly a century. When next the Danes returned in force, it was in the miserable reign of Ethelred the Unready.

CHAPTER IX.

Many-sided greatness of Alfred—His educational reforms—Status of clergy—Asser—Alfred's handbook.

§ 1. THE short remainder of Alfred's life was thus passed in peace, peace well earned by his true greatness in war. Few Kings of England have shown more heroism and ability in the field of battle. Yet his distinction in the field of battle is by far the least of the glories of Alfred. Great as a warrior, he was yet greater as a statesman, greater still as a saint, greatest of all as a man of letters. It is this wondrous many-sidedness which makes the name of Alfred shine with a lustre beyond that of any other monarch before or since. "In him we are reminded of Julius Cæsar, the master of statecraft and warcraft, the engineer, the law-giver, and the writer; and yet more, perhaps, of David, the conqueror of the Philistines, the organizer of the Hebrew monarchy, the deviser of the Temple, the sweet singer of Israel. But neither Cæsar nor David can show a record so fair as that of Alfred.

§ 2. We have seen how from the first beginning of his reign he set himself to the instruction of his people, materially, spiritually, and intellectually; and, though his work must have been interrupted almost at its commencement by the great Danish inroad of 876, it was resumed after the Peace of Wedmore with fresh energy. For that great deliverance had made the King 'England's darling' indeed; and henceforward he shone out before every eye as the ideal hero and pattern. Whatever line of life any one of his subjects might take up, it was to Alfred that he looked as the supreme example of success in that line. In literature, in poetry, in art, in scientific attainments, in bodily exercises, in military skill, in statesmanship, and, above all, in religion, it was Alfred, and

Alfred, and yet again Alfred, who was acclaimed by every tongue to be the best man in the kingdom, the holder of every record in the land. And when all this was joined with a courtesy and affability royal indeed, we can imagine the enthusiasm which such a monarch would kindle in every class of his subjects, the loyalty and love with which he would be regarded.

§ 3. And one and all were made to feel themselves special objects of the interest and affection of their King. 'His Bishops, his Aldermen, his Thanes, his counsellors, yea, and all under him, did he love with exceeding love. And their sons, brought up with his own royal family, regarded he as his own;—never tired, night and day, in teaching them virtue and profitable learning.' His own children were 'committed to the care of masters at schools of learning, as also be all the high-born youth in the land, and many low-born. Here is there diligent reading both in the Latin tongue and no less in the Saxon. Writing also do they learn, so that ere they come to strength for hunting and such-like exercises as beseem their birth, they are already studious and skilled in liberal arts.' And when old enough for a life in their father's Court, 'while taking part in the wonted pursuits befitting their rank, they are not suffered to pass their time in listless idleness. For they have carefully learned the Psalms, also Saxon works, and, beyond all, Saxon poetry, and are for ever reading books.' 'Yea, they abide even until now, worshipping their father, enjoying the love of all about them, showing deference, courtesy, and gentleness to all, both inland folk and outland.' It is a pleasing comment on this passage of Asser to read, in the chronicles, of Edward, Alfred's son, that he never failed to visit his old nurse whenever his progresses brought him into the neighbourhood where she dwelt. 'He had thought it shame not to do so.'

§ 4. Nor was it only the higher classes over whose education Alfred was solicitous. His discernment could detect and reward intellectual promise even in the very humblest, as is attested by the tale, true or false, that he had a swineherd,

named Denewulf, with whose mental ability he was struck during his Athelney wanderings, duly educated for the ministry, and ultimately preferred him to the bishopric of Winchester. 'But never suffered he an unlettered man to hold any ecclesiastical dignity whatsoever.' It is attested also by the anxiety shown by the annalists of every notable place of education in England to connect their foundation in some way with Alfred.

§ 5. In the case of Cambridge it is just possible that the University may really be able to trace a very remote and indirect descent from his exertions, through the little College of priests which he is said, with some plausibility, to have set up at Ely. But in that of Oxford, though the claim is supported by an elaborate story inserted into the chronicle of Asser, it is scarcely possible that even so much as this thread can be conceded. For in Alfred's day the superior convenience of the passage over the Thames at Oxford, which afterwards gave the city its special importance, both commercial and military, and thus led to its educational pre-eminence, does not seem to have been known. The great crossing point of the river was then the old British ford, Wallingford; near which, accordingly, we find both the chief ecclesiastical centre of the region, Dorchester, the seat of the 'bishop-stool' (afterwards transferred to Lincoln) of the immense diocese which (until 1840) stretched from the Thames to the Humber, and also the chief military centre, the now utterly obscure village of Bensington.

§ 6. Fictions such as these University legends are based upon the solid historical fact that Alfred was indeed the first to formulate the aspiration which actually did in due time bring Oxford and Cambridge into being—that an English clergyman should be a man of culture. 'Never suffered he an unlettered man' to hold office in the Church; and he everywhere revived the monastic life, which had all but perished amid the Danish troubles, and which dotted the land thickly in every direction with establishments bound by the very law of their being each

to prove a centre of culture for its neighbourhood. 'Plain living and high thinking' was the rule of their cloisters, and a rule, for the most part well kept, down to the very end of their existence, making them for many a long century the salt of the earth in England, the influence which preserved for us religion, literature, art, and science, all that shines out most brightly in the personality of Alfred. It may well be that to Alfred we owe the principle which was formally embodied in the laws of his successors, and which still differentiates the Anglican Church from every other religious body, that every English clergyman should be entitled to *ex-officio* rank as a gentleman. Every parish priest was reckoned a 'thane,' a word which, originally signifying the attendant on a military chief, early became equivalent to 'gentleman,' as the word 'esquire,' by precisely the same development, has done since.

§ 7. And, while thus providing for the education of his people, Alfred was eaten up by anxiety for his own mental progress. 'Ever would he complain . . . that he was ignorant in Divine wisdom and in the liberal Arts,' and even declare himself unable to read (*i.e.* in the scholarly sense of the word), though 'he had gained some knowledge of almost every book in the world.' And, 'as lights to lighten him onwards,' he gathered round him a galaxy of the best intellects of the day, not only from his own dominions, but from neighbouring lands. Amongst these was Asser, a monk of St. David's, who somewhat unwillingly was brought to leave his native land for 'Saxony,' but who, when once under Alfred's spell, became the most devoted of adherents, and who has left us the most vivid picture of his hero and ours. The King rewarded his devotion by preferment after preferment, giving him 'at twilight one Christmas Eve' the two monasteries of Amesbury and Banwell, 'with a silken pall of great price, and as much incense as a strong man might carry'; and finally making him Bishop of Exeter.

§ 8. It was in 885 that Asser first became an inmate of Alfred's Court and in 893 he wrote his biography. He has

all the charm of a Boswell in his naïve simplicity, and the straightforward self-satisfaction which mingles with his hero-worship. Take, for example, the following anecdote :—

§ 9. 'In this year [887] did Alfred, King of the Anglo-Saxons, first begin, by Divine inspiration, on one and the self-same day, the venerable feast of St. Martin, both to read and to interpret. But that I may explain this more fully . . . I will relate the cause. . . . It came to pass on a certain day we were both sitting in the King's chamber, conversing on all kinds of subjects, as was our wont. And it chanced that I recited to him a quotation [*testimonium*] from a certain book. He listened attentively with all his ears, and pondered it deeply in his heart. Then suddenly showing me a book which he carried in his bosom, wherein were written the Daily Courses and Psalms and Prayers which he had read from his youth up, he bade me write therein that same quotation. Hearing this, and perceiving his willing wit and his devout eagerness for Divine wisdom, then gave I (though silently) boundless thanks to Almighty God, raising my hands towards heaven, that He had implanted in my King's heart such devotion to wisdom.

§ 10. 'But I could not find any empty space in the book wherein to write the quotation, for it was already quite full of many a matter ; wherefore I made some small tarrying, chiefly thereby to stir up the bright intelligence of the King. . . . And when he urged me to make haste and write it speedily, I said unto him, "Wilt thou that I should write it on a separate leaf? For it is not certain but that we may yet find another such extract, or even more, than may please you. And should that so be, we shall be glad to have kept them separate." "Try that plan," he replied. Then gladly did I haste to make ready a fresh sheet [*quaternio*] at the beginning, whereon I wrote the extract even as he bade. And that self-same day I wrote also on that sheet no less than three more quotations at his bidding, even as I had foretold. And every day after, as we talked, did we find other like passages, till the sheet grew wholly full. . . .

§ 11. 'Even as a busy bee rangeth far and wide, searching through the wilds [*gronnios*], even so did he ever eagerly get together many a flower of the Divine Scriptures, with which he filled to overflowing the cells of his heart — and set them in one book, as he might, one with another, by no regular plan, till it grew by degrees to the size of a Psalter. And this volume he called his Encheiridion, or Manual, or Handbook, because he kept it hard at hand both night and day, and drew therefrom, as he would say, no small comfort.'

CHAPTER X.

Alfred's publications—'The Consolations of Boethius'—Bede's 'History of the Anglican Church'—Orosius' 'History of the World'—Its purpose—'Flowerets from St. Augustine'—Gregory's 'Pastoral Care.'

§ 1. NOR did Alfred keep the comfort of his gathered learning to himself. His 'Handbook' itself seems to have been published, as we learn from William of Malmesbury, though, unhappily, no copy of it is now known. And the amount of literary work which he produced is truly marvellous. He was continually bringing out book after book; and the above-named authority tells us that when he died he was engaged on yet another—a translation into English of the Psalter. In theology he translated and edited St. Gregory's 'Pastoral Care,' and a selection which he called 'Flowrets from St. Augustine'; in philosophy, 'The Consolations of Boethius'; in history, Orosius and Bede, the two leading authorities of the day on the subject in its general and English aspects respectively; besides re-editing the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, with amplifications which turn it from a mere dry record of names and dates to a living historical work.

§ 2. This way of dealing with his subject-matter is characteristic of Alfred. He invariably, even in his translations, made the work his own. As he says in his preface to Boethius, 'Sometimes he set word by word, sometimes meaning by meaning,' this latter phrase including exceedingly free handling of his author, to whose moralizings (especially in their metrical portions) he constantly gives an entirely new turn. In Boethius, Christian though he was, we find strangely little reference to the Christian sources of consolation. But to Alfred Christianity is everything, and he never fails to supply this lack in every poem that he renders.

§ 3. Take, for example, the ode with which Boethius concludes his third book:

'Felix, qui potuit boni
Fontem visere lucidam;
Felix qui potuit gravis
Terræ solvere vincula.'

[Blest is the man who hath the power
Good's lucid fount to gain,
Blest, who hath power of this sad earth
To loose the binding chain.]

These opening lines, which might have been written by a pagan philosopher, are thus expanded and Christianized by Alfred:

'Lo! of all upon earth
Is the happiest he
Who hath heart to behold
That clearest of waters
That welleth in Heaven
With light from the Highest:
Who eke from himself
All swartness, all mist,
All the murk of his mood,
To scatter hath might.

'With God and His grace
By tales of old time
Thy thought will we teach,
Till thou readest aright
The highway to Heaven,
That loved Native Land,
Own Home of our souls.'

After this exordium, Alfred proceeds to give a free prose translation, inserting such expressions as 'Well-a-way,' of the beautiful poem of Boethius on Orpheus, and deduces (at greater length) the same moral as the author; viz., that he who would lead his soul from darkness to light must never cast a longing eye backwards.

§ 4. The tragic story of Boethius is now almost forgotten, but for many centuries he was held as the most noteworthy of all exemplars of patience under unmerited adversity. Chaucer, near the end of the Middle Ages, as Alfred near their beginning, thinks it worth while to translate his 'Consolations of Philosophy' into English;—a task which, apart from its connection with their great names, no writer would nowadays care to enter

upon. Boethius, long the trusted minister of Theodoric, the great King of the Ostro-Goths, whose reign gave Italy thirty years of peace amid the stress of the barbarian inroads, fell at last under the unjust suspicion of his master, and was cast into prison at Ravenna, the royal city which the King had just adorned with those marvellous churches and mosaics still abiding amid its decay. There he solaced himself by invoking Philosophy to help him in bearing his hard lot, and composed a dialogue between her and his soul, partly in prose and partly in verse, somewhat laboured and frigid, but containing here and there lines and sentences of real beauty. That the work appealed to the heart of Alfred is the best proof that it is not without genuine merit.

§ 5. In his dealing with Bede and with Orosius, Alfred uses the same freedom—the freedom of a master in literary work. He expands, abridges, paraphrases, as seems best to him, with the result of making his author far more spirited and readable than in the original. Orosius, in particular, he enriches by the insertion of a complete geographical survey of Europe, from original sources, such as the reports of the navigator Othere, the discoverer of the North Cape and the White Sea.

§ 6. Orosius, as has been said, was in Alfred's day the accepted authority on general history, so generally accepted that in his preface Alfred speaks of his history as 'the book that men call Orosius,' just as we talk of 'Herodotus' or 'Thucydides.' It was, in fact, an epoch-making work, being the first history written by a Christian and from a Christian standpoint. Orosius was a friend both of St. Jerome and of St. Augustine, and composed his work at the request of the latter, who desired that the argument of his own 'De Civitate Dei' should be worked out historically.

§ 7. Orosius accordingly, like Augustine, addresses himself to the thesis that the world was, after all, the better and not the worse for the rise of Christ's spiritual kingdom, even though it rose upon the ruins of that mighty dominion which had for centuries been the all-pervading influence throughout

the whole civilized world—the secular empire of Rome. At the time when he wrote, the entire consciousness of mankind was reeling under the shock of the capture of Rome by Alaric and his Goths, its first capture since the days of Brennus and his Gauls eight centuries before. Though the captors were this time fellow-Christians, and prosecuted their success in an incomparably milder and more Christian spirit than has ever been done before or since at the sack of any city, yet the tidings that Rome—the mighty Rome—had fallen, and by barbarian hands, were felt everywhere like a moral earthquake, reverberating with a stunning shock through all hearts and brains of men. This, then, was what had come of renouncing the ancient gods, the gods of 'the brave days of old,' when Rome was invincible, and the world lay in rest and quiet under the ægis of her mighty name. This was what had come of substituting for their immemorial worship a new-fangled Syrian superstition, which belittled local patriotism, and fixed men's minds on a shadowy world beyond the grave.

§ 8. Such thoughts were surging in many a breast, and it was to meet them that Augustine and Orosius wrote. They saw, what at that crisis it took no small intuition to see, how, in it all, God's great purposes were being worked out; how, by His appointment, there was still to be a world-wide organization, whose aim should be the peace and well-being of mankind; how the Catholic Church was to take up the mantle of the Universal Empire, as a kingdom 'not of this world,' relying on spiritual, not on earthly forces, transforming Rome from the temporal into the spiritual metropolis of all the earth. And their message struck home; and thus it was that four centuries later Alfred found the name of Orosius still a household word throughout Latin Christendom, and edited his work along with that of Venerable Bede, the first historian to compile the annals of the Anglican Church.

§ 9. The extent to which the continuation of Bede's history in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is due to Alfred is a

matter on which critics are still divided; but, upon the whole the evidence goes largely to prove that to him indeed we owe the inception of this great idea. From his day onwards we do find that in many parts of England such a chronicle of current events was kept by more than one of the greater abbeys, and that all are from a common exemplar dating from his reign. This Chronicle forms the foundation on which every one of our earlier historians has built, and it only ceased to be compiled when the wonderful galaxy of such historians which shone out in the twelfth century seemed to render its continuance superfluous. The latest entry in any surviving copy is that of 1154, just about the time when Gaimar was writing on Alfred, to tell how he had begun the work:

> 'Il fist escrivere un livre Engleis,
> Des aventures, e des leis,
> E de batailles de la terre,
> E des reis ki firent la guere.' [1]
>
> [Made he write an English book,
> Of adventures and of law,
> And of battles in the land,
> And of kings who wagèd war.]

§ 10. Alfred's edition of the 'Pastoral Care of St. Gregory' and his 'Flowrets from St. Augustine' are chiefly noteworthy for the prefaces which he has prefixed to them. The latter consists of a series of extracts, mostly from the saint's 'Soliloquies,' a work compared by Alfred to a wood full of goodly trees, from amid which he cut beams and joists and planks—'yea, and helves to haft my tools withal,' for the building of a palace for his soul. 'In every tree saw I something needful for my home. Therefore rede I every man that can . . . that he fare to that same wood to fetch more for himself . . . and build therewith many a comely house, . . . and thereby may dwell merrily and softly, so as I yet have not done. But He Who taught me, He to Whom this wood was dear, He may make me to dwell softer in this shifting cot while that I am in this world, and eke in the everlasting home

[1] Line 3451.

which He hath promised us by St. Augustine and St. Gregory and St. Jerome and many another holy Father. Yea, and I trow that, through the merits of all these, He will both make this my path here smoother than heretofore, and chiefly that he will enlighten the eyes of my mind, that I may seek out the rightwise road to the everlasting home and the everlasting glory which, through these holy Fathers, is promised unto us. So be it.' . . .

§ 11. 'No wonder is it, though men swink in their timber-working and in their building. Yet would every man, when he has built him a cot on his lord's lease, fain sometimes rest him therein, and hunt, and fowl, and fish, and use it all ways according to the lease, until the day that he may earn book-land[1] and perpetual holding, through his lord's grace. Even so may the great Giver, Whose are both these shifting cots and the everlasting homes, Who shaped both and wieldeth both,—may He grant me that I be meet for each, both here to be useful and thither to come.'

§ 12. The preface to Gregory's 'Pastoral Care' is better known. Alfred begins by lamenting the decline of education in England through the Danish wars.

'What wise men of old were there in Angle-kin . . . and how happy were then the times. . . . How earnest were the religious . . . and how did outland men then seek wisdom and learning in this land! And now we must get these from without if we would have them. So clean was learning fallen off among English folk, that few there were on this side Humber that could understand the Service in English, or even turn an errand-writing from Latin into English. And not many were there, I ween, beyond Humber. So few they were that I cannot bethink me of so much as one south of Thames, when first I took the kingdom. . . .

'Then I minded me how I saw, ere all was wasted and burnt, how the churches throughout all Angle-kin stood filled with hoard and books, and eke a great press of God's ministers.

[1] *I.e.* copyhold.

Yet full little fruit wist they of those books, for that they were not written in their own land-speech. . . .

§ 13. 'Then wondered I greatly of those good and wise men of old, who had well learnt all those books, that they were not fain to turn them into their own land-speech. Yet soon did I answer myself, and said, "They weened not that ever would men become so reckless, and our learning so fall off; . . . and of set purpose did they let this alone, weening there should be the more wisdom in the land the more tongues we knew."

§ 14. 'Then did I mind me how the Law was first found in the Hebrew tongue, and how, when the Greeks had learnt it, then did they turn it all into their tongue, and eke all the other books. And the Latins again, in like manner, when they had learnt it, turned it all into their own tongue. And likewise have all other Christian folk turned some part to their own speech.

§ 15. 'Wherefore I think it meet . . . that we, too, should turn some books, which are most needful for all . . . into that tongue we all do know; and so bring it to pass (as well we may, by God's help, if we have rest), that every youth that now is in Angle-kin, of free men and men of wealth to seek to such things, may be given over to teachers, while they have no strength for other work, till such time as they may know well to read English writing. After, let men further teach them Latin, those whom they would bring forward to a higher class.

§ 16. And he ends by commending this book—'in Latin *Pastoralis*, and in English the "Hinds-book,"—to each of his Bishops, to be kept in the minster. For we know not how long there may be such learned Bishops, as now, thank God, there be everywhere. Therefore would I that the books be always in their place, save only the Bishop have them with him, or they be lent that others be written by them.' Then he breaks into song:

'This errand-writing
Erst did Augustine
Over the salt sea

Bring from the southward
Unto us islesmen.
As him afore-time
First had appointed
Christ's own Captain,
The Pope of Rome?

[This ærendgewrit
Augustinus
Ofer sealtne sæ
Suthan brohte
Iegbuendum.
Swæ him ærfore
Adihtode
Dryhtnes cempa
Rome Papa.]'

§ 17. Alfred adds that he sends with each copy of this 'Liber Pastoralis' an '*æstel*,' worth 50 'mancuses' (=£7 10s), which 'in God's Name, he forbids to be taken from the book. The word *astilla* in Low Latin means *splinter*; so that these æstels were probably pointers to assist reading, akin to those supplied to day in the Bodleian Library for the use of MSS. students. The price (equivalent to some £250 in modern currency) shows the material and workmanship to have been exceedingly rich. It is highly probable that we have the handle of one of these æstels in the 'Alfred Jewel' (see p. 33); the shape of which is clearly adapted for holding in the hand, while the open end is as clearly designed for the insertion of some small pointer of wood, horn, bone, or ivory.

§ 18. Nor must we pass over the fact that Alfred supplied chapter-headings and prefixed tables of contents to each of his authors, an improvement hitherto unheard of in literary work, which, simple as it seems now to us, betokened, in its first conception, no small literary genius.

CHAPTER XI.

Alfred and Rome—Alms to Jerusalem and India—Home charities—Alfred's devotional life—His lantern.

§ 1. OF Alfred's early devotion to Rome we have already spoken; and through life the Eternal City and its ruler remained special objects of his veneration. Year by year, even in the most troublous times, special envoys passed between him and the Sovereign Pontiff, carrying 'the alms of the West Saxons and King Alfred,' to Rome, and returning with special blessings and privileges and holy relics, including a portion of the True Cross sent by Pope Marinus. So regular were these embassies that the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle finds it worth while to note as its sole entry for 889: 'This year was there no errand to Rome, save that King Alfred sent thither two runners with letters.'[1]

§ 2. Yet while thus devoted to the Holy See, Alfred's Christian sympathies were not bounded by the horizon of Rome. He established like communication with more distant Christian communities, 'in the Tyrrhenian [Mediterranean] sea to the utmost bounds of Iberia.'[2] He interchanged letters and presents with the Patriarch of Jerusalem; and in 883, as a signal mark of gratitude to God for the Peace of Wedmore, even sent alms to the Christian churches of India which claim to have been founded by St. Thomas. 'And there, thanks be to God, full largely gained they the end of their prayer, even after their vow to St. Thomas and St. Bartholomew,' 'when they sat down against the foeman's host wintered in London'[3] [881]. The envoys brought back 'many a strange and brilliant jewel, and of the aromatic juice [? sugar] wherein that land aboundeth.'[4]

1 See note there. 2 Asser, § 114. 3 A.S. Chronicle.
4 William of Malmesbury, § 122.

§ 3. And still more noteworthy were his home charities. He had vowed, as Asser tells us, to devote to God's service 'half of all his wealth, such as rightly and lawfully came in to him year by year,' 'for well knew he the words of the Teacher: *Then is money of true worth when it is handed over to others. Almsgiving is the end of Ownership.*'[1] And he bade his officers divide his revenues accordingly. 'The first part set he for worldly uses, and bade that one third thereof should be paid to his guards and the nobles that were his ministers for the divers offices of his Court . . . according to their rank.' [These officials succeeded each other according to a regular rota, getting one month on duty and two off in every quarter.] 'The second of the three portions gave he to the workmen, whom he had gathered from every nation, and had around him in large number, men skilled in all kind of cunning work.' And the remaining third of this Civil List was spent in donatives to the many foreign guests 'who flocked unto him from far and near.' 'For, whether they asked alms of him or no, yet gave he unto them with wondrous bounty, to each according to his several merits; even as it is written, *God loveth a cheerful giver.*'

§ 4. 'But the second half of all his revenue . . . he gave unto God, bidding his ministers divide it with care into four shares; the first whereof should be discreetly bestowed on the poor, of whatever nation, that came unto him. And on this he bade that, so far as wit of man could answer, the rede of Pope Gregory should be followed: *Give not much to whom you should give little, nor little to whom much, nor aught to whom naught, nor naught to whom aught.*'

§ 5. The second share was given to the two monasteries of his own foundation, the one for monks at Athelney, the other for nuns at Shaftesbury; the third to his schools, the fourth to forward monastic (*i.e.* educational) work 'in all Saxony and Mercia, also, by yearly course, in Britain,[2] Cornwall, Gaul, Armorica,[3] Northumbria—yea, and sometimes in Ireland.'

[1] Simeon of Durham, § 56 (887). [2] Wales. [3] Britanny.

§ 6. Alfred's enlightened liberality having thus provided a wide and judicious scheme of Poor Relief and Education, 'then minded he him of the word that is written: *Whoso will give alms let him first give himself.* And duly began he to think out what he might offer unto God of the service of his own body and soul; for of this he purposed to dedicate to God no less than of his outward wealth. Yea, moreover, and he vowed, so far as his infirmity and occasions would permit, to give up to God the full half of his service, by night and by day, with a good will, and with all his might.

§ 7. 'But inasmuch as he could not readily tell the hours by night, for the darkness (nor yet ofttimes by day, for the storms and clouds), he bethought him how best and easiest, trusting on God's mercy, he might duly perform and keep his vow according to the tenor, even unto death. After long thought thereon, he at length, by shrewd wit, bade his chaplains find him wax of due fineness, and so weighed he it out. And when there was in the scales so much as would match the weight of 72 pennies, then taught he the chaplains to make six candles thereof, of one length, so that each candle might have twelve inches [*uncias pollicis*] marked thereon.

§ 8. 'By this plan did these six candles burn for twenty-four hours, without fail, before the sacred relics of many a saint of God, which were ever with him wheresoever he went. Yet sometimes would they not burn a whole day and night . . . from the force of the wind, which blew without ceasing through the doors and windows of the churches, the chinks in the walls, or the holes in the canvas of tents. . . . Therefore took the King thought, how he might shut out the wind, and like a wise and cunning craftsman, bade he a fair lantern to be made of wood and white ox-horn (which, when skilfully planed thin, is no less clear than glass). Wondrously, then, was this lantern made . . . and a candle therein shone as brightly as without, and was not put out by the wind, for the opening of the lantern was also closed up, at the King's bode, by a door of horn. By this device then did the six candles, lighted

each in turn, last the four-and-twenty-hours, neither more nor less.'[1]

§ 9. The wealth of detail here given strikes us at first as foolish with regard to so simple-seeming an invention. But though horn lanterns, for protecting oil lamps, were known in classical times, they seem to have been rarely used, and we never hear of a candle lantern. The idea of such a lantern appears to be due solely to the genius of Alfred, as does also the plan of measuring time by the burning of a candle; the dropping of water being the gauge in use amongst the Greeks and Romans. Alfred's candles must have been thin rods of wax similar to those used now (and probably then also) in Catholic Churches for votive purposes, which burn, like his, at an average rate of 3 inches per hour, and weigh approximately 1 dwt. per inch.

§ 10. Perhaps a still more supreme flash of genius was Alfred's standardization in this time-keeper of the 24 hours. Before his day (and indeed for 400 years after) day and night were each divided into 12 equal 'hours.' But as the length of day and night varies continually throughout the year, so did the length of these 'hours' vary. Only at the equinoxes were all the 24 equal, and the phrase 'equinoctial hour' meets us in classical scientific treatises as a measure of time. But Alfred's lantern registered these equal equinoctial hours continuously at any time of the year, as all our clocks and watches do now. 'Of course they do,' we say. But it is to Alfred that we owe the adoption of this matter-of-course principle.

§ 11. Alfred's lantern must have been no niggardly adjunct to his devotions. For as each candle was worth a shilling in wax alone (equivalent to at least thirty shillings now) £10 a day would scarcely cover the whole expenditure.

[1] See Asser, § 136.

CHAPTER XII.

Alfred's laws—The Witan—His introduction to the code—Offences against the person—Against property—Dog's first bite—Sanctuary—Statutory holidays—Observance of Sunday—'Church-scot.'

§ 1. THE sense of order and method, which come out so strongly in Alfred's disposition of his time and of his revenue, must have combined with his intense desire for the maintenance of justice and the spread of knowledge amongst his people, in suggesting to him the codification of the floating traditions which at this date made up English law. The practices and principles which by immemorial user were binding in the Common Law of the land had indeed been partly written down in statutes known by the name of Ina, King of Wessex, dealing chiefly with offences against property, and in those of Ethelbert, the first Christian King of Kent, dealing chiefly with offences against the person. There was also a Mercian statute-book attributed to their greatest King, Offa. There existed, moreover, many records of single cases decided as precedents 'by many synods of holy Bishops, and eke other high courts of Witan. . . . And in many synod-books they wrote, here one doom, there another.

§ 2. 'I then, Alfred, King, gathered these together, and had written down many of those that our forefathers held, such as liked me. And many that liked me not set I aside, with advice of my Witan, and on other wise bade to hold them. . . . I then, Alfred, King of the West Saxons, showed all these to my Witan. And they then said that it liked them well all for to hold.'

§ 3. The 'Witan,' it may be mentioned, was the embryo Parliament of the Anglo-Saxon constitution, not yet a representative body (a development which did not obtain til the thirteenth century), but the general assembly of the realm, in which every free-born Englishman had a right to

appear in person and to express his opinion, by voice and gesture, on any proposition brought forward by the executive government. As a matter of fact, few but the leading men of each district practically took the trouble to attend at any place of meeting remote from the district. And only the higher aristocracy were personally summoned by the King's writ. The Witan thus constantly tended to become more and more a House of Lords; and, indeed, our present House of Lords represents by a succession of unbroken continuity this primitive feature of every Teutonic constitution. But a real original 'Witan' may still be seen in full activity in the general assemblies of some of the Swiss cantons, at which every citizen attends armed, under the open sky, and expresses assent or dissent, not by formal voting, but by unmistakable acclamation. Such was the body to whose approval Alfred submitted his new code of English law.

§ 4. And it is specially characteristic of Alfred's genius that in so doing it was no mere dry codification of offences and penalties that he laid before his people. Not only did he make the enactments of previous legislators his own by careful revision; but he gave his work a literary and religious finish, by prefixing to it a digest of the Mosaic Law (omitting the ceremonial clauses), with a conclusion of his own pointing out how the severe spirit of that Law was modified by that of the New Law of Christ. He thus begins with a free version of the Ten Commandments:

§ 5. 'The Lord was a-speaking this Word to Moses; and thus He said:

'I am the Lord thy God. I led thee forth out of the Egyptians' land and out of their bondage.

'Love thou not other strange Gods above Me.

'Nor My Name take thou idly; for that thou beest not guiltless with Me if thou idly takest My Name.

'Mind that thou hallow the Rest-day. Work ye six days and on the seventh rest you. For that in six days Christ made heaven and earth, the seas, and all creatures that are

in them, and rested Him on the seventh day, and therefore the Lord hallowed it.

'Honour thy father and thy mother that the Lord gave thee, that thou be the longer living on earth.

'Nor slay thou not.

'Nor commit thou not fornication.

'Nor steal thou not.

'Nor speak thou not false witness.

'Nor covet thou not thy neighbour's goods unrighteously.

'Nor work thee not golden gods nor silvern.'

[This last precept is verse 23 of Exodus xx., and forms no part of the Ten Commandments, though it seems to be introduced here to make up the number. It must be remembered that while, from the first, *ten* was the recognised number of the Commandments (see Deut. iv. 13), the details of the numeration have also from the first varied. The division made in Deuteronomy v. differs from that in Exodus xx., though the precepts are identical. And it is this Deuteronomical division which has been generally accepted amongst Christians; both the Roman and Greek Churches agreeing in considering what Protestants call the *second* Commandment as part of the *first*, and making 'Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour's wife' the ninth. The Protestant numeration came in at the Reformation, with a view to emphasizing the prohibition of images. The Jews have made up their 'Ten Words' on yet a third system, agreeing with Catholics in regarding the Protestant first and second as one, and with Protestants in uniting the Catholic ninth and tenth, but considering the first 'Word' to be: 'I am the Lord thy God which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the House of Bondage.']

§ 6. The precepts found in Exodus xxi., xxii., xxiii., follow almost entire, with the substitution of 'Christian' for 'Hebrew' in xxi., ver. 2, and the omission of the dedication of the first-born (xxii. 29). The institution of the sabbatical year is also omitted. At the end of xxiii. 13, Alfred continues thus :

§ 7. 'These be the dooms that Almighty God Himself spake unto Moses, and bade him to hold. And since the Lord's only-begotten Son, our God, that is our Saviour Christ, came on this middle earth,[1] He said that He came not to break these bodes, nor to forbid them, but with all good to eke them out; and mild-heartedness and lowliness of mind did He teach.

§ 8. Then, after His Passion, ere His Apostles were gone forth to teach all the earth, and while yet they were together, many heathen people did they turn to God. Thus, while they were all together, they sent errand-doers to Antioch and to Syria to teach Christ's Law. Then when they understood that they sped not, then sent they an errand-writing to them. And this is the errand-writing that all the Apostles sent:

§ 9. '"To Antioch and to Syria and to Cilicia, that be now from heathen peoples turned to Christ.

'"The Apostles and the Elder Brethren wish you health. And we give you to wit that we have heard that some of our fellowship have come to you with our words, and bade you to hold a heavier way than we bade them, and have too much misled you with their manifold ordinances, and have rather perverted your souls than set them right.

'"Then we assembled us together on this, and it seemed good to us all to send Paul and Barnabas, men that will give their lives for the Name of the Lord. With them we send Judas and Silas to tell you the same.

'"It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us that we lay no burden upon you above that which is needful for you to hold: that is, then, that ye forbear from the worship of devils-guilds, and from the partaking of blood and of things strangled, and from fornication, and that ye do not unto others as ye would not they should do unto you."

§ 10. 'From this one doom a man may understand that he should doom all aright. Nor needeth him none other doom-book. Let him take heed that he doom to no man as he

[1] *Middangeard.* This was a common name for the world, as being below heaven and above hell.

would not that he should doom to him, if he sought doom of him.

'Since it came to pass that many peoples took on the Faith of Christ, there were many synods held in all the earth, and eke in Angle-kin, since they took to the Faith of Christ, of holy Bishops and other High Courts of Witan.

§ 11. 'Then set they forth, through the mild-heartedness that Christ taught, for almost every misdeed, that the secular authorities might, with their goodwill, without sin, at the first offence, take their fee-boot that they then awarded. But for treason against a lord they durst proclaim no such mild-heartedness, for that Almighty God made none such doom to them that slighted Him, nor Christ, the Son of God, to him that sold Him. And He bade love a Lord as Himself.'

§ 12. The last sentence is an entirely original application of Christ's precept as to Cæsar and God (Matt. xxiii.), and illustrates the special severity with which high treason was from the first regarded by English law. The option of condoning almost all other offences for a 'fee-boot,' or pecuniary penalty, was an immemorial principle in all Teutonic legislation, though Alfred apparently attributes its introduction to the milder spirit infused by Christianity. In his code the system is carried out to the most elaborate pitch, a regular scale of fines being drawn up for every conceivable form of theft or of violence; for petty larceny, highway robbery, housebreaking, rioting, slander, false imprisonment, and no fewer than thirty-three distinctly specified kinds of mutilation.

§ 13. An ear, for example, is priced at 60 shillings, as is also the tongue, the nose, or an eye, 'but if it yet be in the head, though he may see nought therewith, let the third part of the boot stand.' A front tooth is 8s., a 'cheek-tooth' 12s., 'and a man's tusk is 15s. worth.' Not only has each finger its value (the thumb 30s.; 'the shooting-finger,' *i.e.* the fore-finger, 15s.; the middle 12s.; the third, 'the gold [ring] finger,' 17s.; the little finger 9s.); but each nail also, from 5s. for a thumb-nail to 1s. for that of the little finger.

§ 14. The value of all these sums must be multiplied from twenty to thirty fold to correspond with their present purchasing power, so that it would seem as if comparatively few could escape by their payment from the imprisonment or corporal chastisement ('hide-gild') whlch the code speaks of as the alternative. But no scale for this is given, and we have to remember that every Englishman was by Alfred's ordinance a member of a certain district, called a 'Hundred,'[1] which was responsible for his good behaviour and for any fines he might incur. The 'Hundred-Court,' which met once a quarter, was empowered to deal with its own offenders according to their 'tithings,' these last divisions being practically equivalent to our parishes. The code, accordingly, makes careful provision for the formalities to be observed when a man changes his place of residence, and imposes heavy penalties (120 shillings) for their non-observance.

§ 15. The fines for certain transgressions varied according to the rank of the injured party. Thus, to break into a house belonging to the King was 120 shillings. An Archbishop might be burglarized for 90s., a Suffragan or an Alderman for 60s., a 'twelve-hind' man for 30s., a 'six-hind' for 20s., while a churl could only claim 5s. The 'churl,' it may be mentioned, was the lowest class of free land-owner, the status of members of the thanehood (or squirearchy) above him being estimated by the number of labourers ('hinds') employed by each. The traditional proportion of these to his arable land was one for every 10 acres. A 'twelve-hind' man would thus hold 120 acres, a 'hide' of land.[2] Yet even against the churl offences were far from cheap. To 'swinge' him cost 20s., to imprison him or to shave his head 30s., and even his beard might not be meddled with under 10s.

1 William of Malmesbury, § 122. The name was probably derived from the number of 'hides' in the area, a 'hide' being about 120 acres. The hundreds, which may still be seen marked on old-fashioned maps, thus contain about twenty-five square miles on an average.

2 An entry in the Ramsey Cartulary (Rolls Series, vol. i., p. 120) incidentally mentions that 11 hides = 44 virgates = 1,320 acres.

§ 16. In the light of recent judicial decisions, it is interesting to note that, under Alfred, a dog was not, as now, legally entitled to his first bite.

'If a hound slit or bite a man, let the owner pay for the first misdeed 6s. [equivalent to some £10 now], for the next 12s., for the third 30s.' And in any further case he had also to pay the full 'were'—or compensation according to damage—in addition. To 'keep' the dog or give him meat was sufficient to prove you his responsible owner.

§ 17. All offences committed 'while the army is out' are doubly fined, as is also the case during Lent, or if any sacrilege is involved. Any breach of sanctuary incurs, besides compensation, a fine of 120 shillings, and stealing from a church the loss of the hand that did the deed. 'He that stealeth on Sunday night, or at Yule, or Easter, or on Holy Thursday, or on "gang" days,[1] for each be there two-fold boot, as in Lent.' Every consecrated church might give sanctuary even to a known criminal for a week. 'And eke church-frith is that if any man seek a church for any crime not yet known, and there confess it in God's name, be it half forgiven.'

§ 18. Statute holidays are commanded on Christmas Day, and twelve days after, on 'the day that Christ overcame the devil' (Ash Wednesday), on St. Gregory's Day (March 12), on Easter Day, with the week before and the week after, on the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul (June 29), 'and in harvest the full week before St. Mary's Mass' (*i.e.* the Feast of the Assumption, August 15), on All Saints' Day, and on the Wednesday of the four Ember weeks. On these holidays no work could be required of any free men in the performance of the customary services which they rendered in lieu of rent to their landlord; who was thus thrown back at these periods on such labour as he could hire, or that of his own 'theow-men' (or slaves), if he had any. But even these might not be employed on Sunday. 'If a theow-man work on Sunday at his lord's behest, be he

[1] *I.e.* Rogation days, so called from the old custom of going round the parish bounds in procession, singing the Litany, on those days.

free, and the lord forfeit thirty shillings. If he work without behest let him suffer in his hide. If a freeman work that day let him forfeit his freedom or sixty shillings. And let a priest be held doubly guilty.'

§ 19. This last enactment is of special interest, as showing that we owe that stricter and more primitive observance of the Lord's Day, which it is the boast of Anglo-Saxons to continue, not, as is commonly supposed, to the Puritans of the sixteenth century, but to a much earlier source. Alfred's legislation on this point is taken from that of Ina (A.D. 688), and is repeated and amplified by later English codes. That of Athelstane (A.D. 925) adds: 'If anyone market on Sunday he shall lose the goods, and eke thirty shillings'; while Ethelred (A.D. 980), bids 'the Sunday feast be rightly kept by all. Let markets and folk-motes, huntings and worldly works, be straitly kept from on that holy day. The Mass-Priests shall on the Sunday give the people the sense of the Gospel and Epistle in English and tell out in English the Paternoster and the Credo, to the end that all folk may learn the Christian Faith on that day.' And though a laxer tone was introduced by the ecclesiastical adventurers who swarmed over at the Conquest, yet the old English ideal of Sunday never died out, and is again and again mentioned as one of the features of every religious revival in our land right down to the Reformation.

§ 20. Alfred also enacts that every child must be baptized within a month under a penalty of thirty shillings. If after that it dies unbaptized, the party responsible forfeits 'all whatsoever he owneth.' The appointed church-rate ('church-scot') had to be paid each year by Martinmas, defaulters being mulcted in sixty shillings, and twelve-fold their 'scot.'[1] And if anyone who had 'forfeited his hide' sought refuge in a church, 'be the swingeing forgiven him.'

§ 21. Such was the merciful code of Alfred, in which the

[1] This word is the name of the oldest Saxon coin, the *scœtta*, a small silver piece, about the size of a threepenny-bit, bearing some rude imitation of Roman coinage. The phrase 'scot-free' and 'to pay your shot' are derived from it.

death-penalty is conspicuous by its absence. It was reserved, indeed, as we have seen was Alfred's principle, for treason alone. This guilt might be incurred either actively or constructively (by harbouring traitors), and could only be atoned by the forfeiture of life and goods. But the accused had opportunity to clear himself, if he could, before his lord.

CHAPTER XIII.

Death of Alfred—Encomiums of chroniclers—His burial—The 'Proverbs of Alfred'—His work completed by his children.

§ 1. HISTORIANS are divided as to the period of Alfred's life in which this great work of legislation was done. It seems probable, indeed, that he began it early, and did not conclude it till towards the end of his reign. After all, he was only fifty, when, 'shattered by the toil of the Danish wars,'[1] in 900,[2] 'six days before All-Hallow-mass' (*i.e.* October 26), 'Alfred, the Truth-teller,[3] a hero mighty in battle, prudent, religious, and wise beyond all, to the great woe of his people, went the way of all flesh;' 'that steadfast stay of the West Saxons, full of justice, bold in arms, learned in speech, and, beyond all else, filled with divine lore;'[4] 'renowned, warlike, victorious, the devoted champion of widows, orphans, and poor; so skilled in Saxon song-craft; the darling of his people; kind of speech to all, and free of hand; endued with prudence, fortitude, justice, and temperance; so patient under his daily infirmity; so fair and so sagacious in executing justice; so watchful and so devout in God's service.'[5] 'His unwearied rule,' says Henry of Huntingdon, 'his never-ending toil, may I not worthily set forth, save in verse:

'Thine own greatness inborn, O Alfred mighty in battle,
Made thee a teller of truth, and truth-telling made thee a doer,
And thy doing of deeds hath made thee a name everlasting.
Not without sadness thy joy, thy hopes with fear interwoven.
Ever, when worsted, thou madest thee ready to fight on the morrow,
Ever, when victor, the more didst thou dread thee to fight on the morrow—
Stained were thy garments with sweat, with gore thy falchion bepainted,
Marking how heavily weighed upon thee the burden of kingship.
Nay, for in all the wide world like thee we find not another,

1 'Book of Hyde.'
2 For the vexed question of the year of Alfred's death see Appendix C.
3 Asser. 4 Ethelwerd. 5 Florence of Worcester.

Who, mid so many an ill, might breathing-space gain for a moment.
Never could foeman's steel his steel beat down from his hand-grip;
Never was forged the blade that could end his toil with a sword-stroke.
Now, when the woes of his reign and his life-long labours are over,
Christ be to him true Rest, be Christ his Kingdom unending.'[1]

§ 2. 'He was buried, as was meet, with kingly worship in the royal city of Winchester, in the Church of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles,' 'in the New Minster, where, with the just, he awaiteth the garment of immortality and a glorious resurrection,'[2] 'when he shall once again be crowned.'[3] 'O reader, pray thou thus; "Christ, Redeemer, save Thou his soul."'[4]

§ 3. 'The Book of Hyde' mentions that he was at first buried in Winchester Cathedral, till 'through the folly of the canons,' who fancied that he 'walked,' his son Edward translated his remains to the New Minster, Hyde Abbey, which Alfred had himself founded. There his tomb 'of most precious porphry'[5] remained an object of veneration till broken up, along with many another royal and saintly sepulchre, by the greed of Henry VIII.

§ 4. But no tombstone was needed to keep the memory of Alfred green in the hearts of Englishmen. From age to age his name was handed on as the saint and hero that he was, and the echoes of his wisdom were passed from lip to lip, till every wise saying that found acceptance amongst English folk was fathered, whether truly or mistakenly, on him. Thus came into being that wonderful work, 'The Proverbs of Alfred,'[6] selections from which will most fittingly conclude our sketch of his life. The poem in its present form dates from the

1 For the Latin see Henry of Huntingdon, § 17.

2 Florence of Worcester. 3 Roger of Wendover.

4 Ethelwerd. 5 Chronicle of St. Neot's.

6 This poem is found only in two MSS.—one in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge, the other in that of Jesus College, Oxford. It has been published by Kemble, in his 'Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn,' and by Morris, in his 'Old English Miscellany.' I do not know of any translation; but that which I give here is practically word for word, and absolutely metre for metre. The whole series of the 'Proverbs' runs to several times the length of the extracts here rendered.

twelfth or thirteenth century, but it may well be founded on something much older. And the words it puts into Alfred's mouth show, at least, a true insight into his heroic and saintly nature. Thus it runs:

Sat there at Seaford [1]
Many a thane,
Many wise Bishops,
Much folk book-learned;
Proud were the earls there,
Noble the knights.

There was Earl Alfric,
Wise he in law-lore;
There too was Alfred,
England's darling,
England's shepherd,
England's King.

Them 'gan he learn,
As now ye hear,
How they their life
Might bestmost lead.

Alfred was of England King,
Strong and skilled in everything;
He was King, and he was clerk,
Lovèd he full well God's work;
Wise in word,
And ware in deed;
Sure the wisest man was he
Of all folk that England's be.

Thus quoth Alfred.
England's joy:
'Would ye, my folk,
List now your Lord,
Then should ye wit
Of Wisdom's way;
How ye may this world's
Worship wield,
And eke your soul
To Christ may cleave.'

Wise were ths words
That Alfred spake:
'Mildly I move you,
Dear my friends,

[1] Probably Seaford in Sussex, but it is quite immaterial.

Poor and eke rich,
People of mine,
That all do fear
Our Christ and Lord.
Love Him and please Him
Who Lord is of Life;
He the one Good,
Over all goodness;
He the One Wise,
Over all wisdom;
He the One Blest,
Over all blessing;
He the One Master,
Mildest of men;
He the One Father,
He the One Helper,
Of each and all.
He the One Righteous,
So rich and so royal,
That nought of his need
That man shall fail
Who here on earth
Doth worship Him.'

. . . .

Thus quoth Alfred,
England's stay:
'No King of right
'Neath Christ is throned,
But if of books
He wot the lore,
That he his writs
Can soothly read—
A lettered man;
And look himself
How he his land
May hold with Law.'
'Earl is and Etheling[1]
Under the King,
The land to lead
With lawful deed,
Both clerk and knight
With even right,
Both poor and rich,
To judge 'mid each.
For so as man soweth

[1] *I.e.* Prince.

So also he moweth,
And every man's doom
To his own door doth come.

'Behoveth the knight
'Gainst foemen to fight,
Lest they harry the land
With fire-raising band;
That the Church have her peace;
And the churl be at ease,
His seeds for to sow,
His meads for to mow,
To the welfare of all.
To the knight this I tell,
Let him look to it well.'

. . . .

Thus quoth Alfred:
'No, never should youth
Give him o'er to distress,
Albeit his case
Misliketh him sore,
And the thing that he would
He hath not to wield.
For God may yet give,
When that He will,
Good after evil,
Weal after woe:
And well is the man
That hath shapen it so.'

. . . .

Thus quoth Alfred:
'Hard is it to row
'Gainst the tide in his flow;
So is it to toil
'Gainst the heart's own turmoil.
Yet he that in youth
So to labour is fain,
World's wealth for to gain,
That in eld he may rest;
And eke 'mid his wealth
Aye worketh God's will;
His youth's hard spell
It hath sped him full well.'

. . . .

Thus quoth Alfred:
'If thou silver and gold

Hast to wield from of old,
Yet never on earth
Take thou pride in thy birth.
It is not thine elders',
It is not thine own;
All is but God's loan.'

. . . .

Thus quoth Alfred:
'In the flood-tide of fortune
Ne'er put thou thy trust,
Though silver and gold
Thou hast untold.
To nought shall it come;
To dust shall it drive;
But the Lord, He liveth
For evermore.'

. . . .

Thus quoth Alfred:
'If thou in thine eld
Art wasted in wealth,
And no more canst lead thee
With power nor with might,
And no more hast strength
For to steer thee aright;
Then thank the Lord
Of all His love,
And of all thine own life,
And the light of the day,
And of all the mirth
He maketh for man.
And whereso thou wendest,
Say this at the end:
Whate'er may befal me,
God's Will be done.'

. . . .

Thus quoth Alfred:
'Son of my heart, come,
Sit thee beside me,
And I will instruct thee
In tracks of truth.
My son, I do feel
That paleth my face,
That fadeth my hue,
That faileth my heart.
My days be nigh done;
Eftsoon must we part.

For I shall me wend
To the other world,
And thou shalt outlive me
In all my wealth.
'My son, now I bid thee,
My dear one, my own,
Thou father thy folk,
And be thou true Lord.
To orphans be parent,
To widows be friend,
To poor men be comfort,
To weak men be stay;
And wronged men right
With all thy might.
And keep thou the Law;
And love thou the Lord;
And think above all
Of God, with full mind;
And bide till He rede thee
In all thy deed;
The more shall He help thee
To all thy will.'

And the son here addressed was worthy of these touching words, and of his noble father. Next to Alfred himself, Edward the Elder is the monarch to whom England owes most. Without such a successor Alfred's work must have been in vain, and England, in spite of it, have broken up into a shifting congeries of petty independent States—Danish for the most part—with no national unity, and no splendid vista of national development and national glory. For the averting of this fate we have to thank the 'Children of Alfred,' Edward himself and his heroic sister Ethelfled, who, as widow of the Mercian Alderman Ethelred, was styled the 'Lady of the Mercians.'

From the moment of their father's death, these two—the same of whose promise in their youth so bright a picture is drawn by Asser—set themselves to complete his work, and to harvest the good seed sown by him. Their first task was the systematic reduction of the Danish settlements in Mercia, pursuant of Ethelfled's claim to the dominion of that whole land, north as well as south of Watling

Street. Here the Danes had formed a group of military heathen oligarchies,[1] holding down the old English and Christian populations in a kind of serfdom. One by one these were brought under, and curbed by fortified posts, scientifically placed at strategic points, whose names, like St. Neot's and St. Ives (from the Cornish town so called), still bear witness to their West Saxon origin.

And finally, such was the respect inspired by this steady and irresistible advance of the native power, that not only did every district of England acknowledge Edward as King, but the whole of Britain bowed to his sway. The Scots and Picts beyond the Forth, the Britons of Strathclyde and Cumbria, the various Welsh principalities from the Wirral to the Severn Sea, all alike 'took him to Father and to Lord.' Under his suzerainty the whole island became, for the first time in history, united in one political entity, and the British Empire had begun.

Such was the outcome of the life-work of Alfred.

1 Such as the 'Five Boroughs'—Derby, Nottingham, Leicester, Lincoln, and Stamford.

APPENDIX A.

The Jutes.

THE name of Jute is only used of the English settlers in Kent on the authority of Bede (i. 15). There is no trace of its use either in Kent, where they called themselves simply Kant-waras or in the South Hampshire district, which Bede also assigns to them, where they were Meon-waras, *i.e.* dwellers on the River Meon. In the Isle of Wight, to which they spread, the name is Wight-waras. This local nomenclature points to their having no common racial name, like the Angles or Saxons, but being a medley pirate gang, deriving their appellation from the patronymic of their chief and his immediate followers. This nucleus of the gang may well have come from the Danish Jutland. The earliest Kentish grave-finds, however, have their affinity not with that district, but with the valley of the Rhine. And the early Kentish institutions show Frankish influence. The whole evidence is most ably and carefully worked out by the latest writer on the subject, Mr. Thurlow Leeds, in his 'Archæology of the Anglo-Saxon Settlement' (1913). And his conclusion is that a pirate captain from Jutland—(the 'Hengist,' who figures in the Finn Saga as warring, at the head of a band of 'Eotena,' in Friesland), was there joined by a body of Franks from the Upper Rhine, and led his united force into Britain.

APPENDIX B.

The 'English School' in Rome.

THIS was a precinct in the Leonine City opening into the portico of (old) St. Peter's to the North, and bounded by the Tiber to the South. It is called in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 'The School of England' [*Angelcynnes Scolu*]. In the Latin chroniclers it is Schola Anglorum, or Saxonum, or Anglo-Saxonum. The word *schola* had at that date no necessary connection with education, but was used of any kind of corporate institution. That our School had such a corporate organization we learn from the 'Liber Pontificalis' (A.D. 800 and 846), where we also learn that the English themselves called it a 'borough.' The name *Borgo* still clings to the site.

In early mediæval times every nation sending a sufficiently large number of pilgrims to Rome seems to have had such a precinct; we thus read also of the French, Lombard, and Frisian 'Schools.' The denizens of these schools were, in some sort, military organizations, and owed military service to the Pope. The word *Schola* indeed, has often, in late Latin, a distinctively military connotation. That of the English contained many lodging-houses (*domos*), in which our pilgrims found shelter and entertainment, and also a church dedicated to St. Mary (S. Maria in Sassia [*Saxonica*], now S. Spirito in Sassia), which had the then rare privilege of sepulture (A.S. Chron., 874), and was served by a permanent colony of English ecclesiastics, the Superior being appointed by Papal Bull. Innocent III. transferred them in 1204 to St. Pantaleone, on the other side of the Tiber, and made over their old school to the Knights of St. John. The existing 'English College' in Rome dates from the thirteenth century.

The School (founded by Ina, King of Wessex, 688) was twice burnt out, once under Pope Paschal I. (817-824), and again in the first year of Leo IV. (847). In both cases the preservation of the adjoining portico of St. Peter's is ascribed to the special prayer of

the Pope: Raphael, in the Vatican *stanze*, shows us Leo IV. in the act of thus checking the conflagration. At Alfred's visit in 853 the rebuilding of the place (mainly at his father's charge) must have been in progress, and it was probably on its completion that the precinct, at his request, was freed from taxation by Pope Marinus (A.S. Chron., 885).

Able articles on this little-known subject will be found in the *Dublin Review*, vol. cxxiii., also in Stevenson's 'Asser,' p. 249.

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APPENDIX C.

The Date of Alfred's Death.

THE confusion of dates in the chroniclers, which causes some to place Alfred's death in 899, others in 900, and others, again, in 901, arises from the lack in the early Middle Ages of any generally accepted chronological system. Our present *Anno Domini* reckoning came into common use about 550, the date of the Incarnation being then supposed to have been conclusively established by the elaborate calculations of Dionysius Exiguus (526). But there were never wanting critics who declared that the true date was two (or four) years earlier than that adopted by him, and chroniclers were apt to be thus confused. Bede, for example, uses in his 'Ecclesiastical History' our present reckoning, but in his 'Chronicles' the *Verus Annus*, two years behind it. Not till the twelfth century did the supreme convenience of a universally recognised era render these criticisms of merely academic interest.

A further source of error arose from the absence of any fixed New Year's Day. Most early writers begin the year with the Incarnation (March 25), but some take the Nativity (December 25), some the Circumcision (January 1), whilst some reckon from the Crucifixion. The Roman Era (A.U.C.) is also in use, and this began April 21, though the Roman Civil Year commenced on January 1. Some chroniclers, again, reckon by regnal years, and of these, some count as the first year of any given King the whole of the civil (or ecclesiastical) year in which his reign began, some the actual twelve months during which he first sat on the throne.

Add the errors and amendments of copyists, and we can easily see how the year given in one chronicle as 899 might be in another 900, and in another 901. The wonder is that there is not much greater confusion. Nor is it worth while to spend overmuch good time and thought in attempting to harmonise these discrepancies. A mild balance of probability between the rival dates is the best we can hope to attain, and this, in my view, seems rather to incline to 900.

The whole involved question of the chronology of the mediæval historians is exhaustively dealt with by Mr. Petrie ('Monumenta Brit.,' 9. 103).

END OF PART I.

PART II.

EXTRACTS FROM THE CHRONICLERS, WITH PREFATORY NOTICES.

I.

ASSER.

'OF THE DEEDS OF ALFRED.'

THE biography of Alfred which goes under the name of Asser is admitted by the all but unanimous consent of historical criticism to be his indeed, and to have come down to us (with the one or two very obvious and unskilful interpolations noted as such hereinafter) substantially as the author left it.

Asser, as he himself tells us, was a monk of St. David's, and an inmate of Alfred's Court from 884 onwards. His chronicle ends so abruptly (in 893) that we may conjecture it to be unfinished.

His personal acquaintance with Alfred, and his access to first-hand sources of information for the whole period of which he writes, render his work the foundation for every subsequent attempt to portray our hero-King.

No ancient MS. of Asser is now known to exist, since that in the Cottonian Collection perished by fire in 1731. Most scholars agree with Mr. Stevenson that this lost MS., so far as can now be judged, was written early in the 10th century, *i.e.* very shortly after Alfred's death. This lost MS. was edited by Parker in 1574, and again by Camden (1603), and by Wise (1722), but none of these editions are free from careless inaccuracies and somewhat reckless emendations. In 1904 Mr. Stevenson brought out an accurate reprint, with an exhaustive critical apparatus and notes, which is the last

word on the subject. Parker freely interpolated passages from the Chronicle of St. Neot's (which he ascribed also to Asser) and these interpolations, such as the story of the Cakes, 'so by use so cleave unto their place,' that no editor is now bold enough to omit them. They are here indicated in the foot-notes. The generally recognized division into chapters is indicated by Clarendon type, but for reference a more convenient arrangement in Sections is used.

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8 How the English subdued Wales.
9 Of Alfred at Rome.
10-11 Of the Danes in Thanet.
12-18 How King Ethelwulf tithed the realm, and how he wedded Judith, and what came thereof.
19-20 How King Ethelwulf died, and of his Will.
21 Of King Ethelbald.
22-23 Of King Ethelbert.
24 Of King Ethelred, and of the Danes in East Anglia.
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30-31 Of the Danes at York.
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33 Of the Danes at Nottingham.
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52-57 How the Danes overran all Wessex; and of Alfred in Athelney.
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61-63 How the English rose against the Danes; and of the fight at Ethandune.
64-55 Of the peace made at Wedmore
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ASSER.

TO ALFRED, KING OF THE ANGLO-SAXONS,[1] AND RULER OF ALL CHRISTIAN FOLK WITHIN THE ISLAND OF BRITAIN,[2] MY KINDEST AND MOST WORSHIPFUL LORD AND MASTER, ASSER, LOWEST OF ALL GOD'S SERVANTS, WISHETH, FOR EITHER LIFE, BOTH HERE AND HEREAFTER, WEALTH A THOUSANDFOLD, TO HIS HEART'S DESIRE AND PRAYER.[3]

§ 1. [**Chap. 1**] In the year of our Lord's Incarnation 849, at the royal town of Wanating [Wantage], in the shire called Berrocscire [Berkshire] (drawing this name from Berroc Wood, wherein the box-tree groweth freely), was born the King of the Anglo-Saxons, ALFRED.

§ 2. Son was he to King Ethelwulf, who was the son of Ecgbert,[4] son of Ealhmund, son of Eafa, son of Eoppa, son of Ingild. Full brethren were Ingild and Ina,[5] that far-famed King of the West Saxons who wended him Rome-wards, and at Rome ended with good report this life here, so to begin in the Kingdom of Heaven his reign with Christ.

§ 3. And these brethren were sons of Ceolwald, son of Cudam [*Cutha*], sone of Cuthwine, son of Ceaulin,[6] son of Cynric, son of Creoda, son of Cerdic,[7] son of Elesa, son of Geuuis, from whom the Britons call all that stock Gegwuis.[8]

[Asser continues the genealogy through eight more mythical generations to Geatta, whom, on the authority of the Latin poet Sedulius,[9] he declares to have been a Teutonic deity, and thence through ten more descents to Shem, and so to Adam.]

§ 4. [**2**] Alfred's mother hight Osburga, a devout woman, and keen of wit withal, great of heart as high in birth. Child was she of Oslac, the far-famed cupbearer[10] of King Ethelwulf. Now this

1 See note, page 2.

2 This is a very unusual title, but substantially correct. See p. 43.

3 This dedication, as appears from the facsimile of the Cottonian MS. made for Wise (1722), was written in uncial characters ; the body of the MS. in cursive.

4 The 'uniter of the Heptarchy.' See p. 6.

5 Ina reigned 688—728.

6 Bretwalda, A.D. 518.

7 The original leader of the West Saxons into Britain.

8 The Welsh form of the O. E. *Gewis*. Our *w* is habitually thus transliterated in Welsh (compare *qu* for *w* in Old Scotch). N.B. Asser was from Wales.

9 A.D. 430.

10 *Pincerna*, the word used in the Vulgate for Pharaoh's 'butler.'

Oslac was by birth a Goth, sprung both from Goths and Jutes,[1] and of the stock of Stuf and Wihtgar, brethren alike and earls. From their uncle, King Cerdic, and his son, Cynric, their cousin, had they sway over the Isle of Wight. And there, at a place hight Gwihtgara-burhg [Carisbrooke], slew they the few British indwellers whom they found in that island; for the other folk thereof had been slain before, or had fled into exile.

§ 5. [3] In the year of our Lord's Incarnation 851 (the third of King Alfred's age) did Ceorl, earl of Devonshire, with the men of Devon, fight the heathen at Uigam-beorg; and the Christians won. And in the same year the Heathen wintered in the island called Scheapieg [Sheppey], which, being interpreted, is Sheep Isle. It lieth in the Thames between Essex and Kent, but nearer to Kent than to Essex, and hath a fair Minster[2] therein.

§ 6. [4] Also, in the same year, did a mighty heathen host, with 350 ships, come in into Thames mouth, and laid waste Dorubernia [Canterbury], the chief city of Kent, and eke London, which is on the march between Essex and Middlesex; howbeit it belongeth of right to Essex. And Beorhtulf, King of Mercia, who came forth to meet them with all his war-folk, did they put to flight. [5] And thereafter the aforesaid heathen host past over into Surrey, which lieth on Thames-bank southward, and from Kent westward.

§ 7. Then came Ethelwulf, King of the West Saxons, with Ethelbald, his son, and with all his war-men, and fought with them no short battle, at a place called Aclea [Ockley], which meaneth Oak-lea. There strove they long and long (for full stout was either side, and full bold), even until the most part of that heathen horde was utterly overthrown and slain, so that never heard we tell of their being so cut down in any place, either before or since, in one day. And the Christians won them all honour, and theirs was the death-stead.

[6] Moreover, in the same year King Athelstan,[3] son of King Ethelwulf, and Ealhere the earl, utterly destroyed in Kent no small host of the Heathen, at a place called Sandwich. And nine of their ships took they; and the rest gat them off and fled.

1 See p. 84.

2 Founded by Saxburga, the sister of St. Etheldreda.

3 King of Kent, afterwards St. Neot.

§ 8. [7] In A.D. 853, the fifth of King Alfred's age, Burghred, King of the Mercians, sent an errand unto Ethelwulf, King of the West Saxons, and besought of him aid against the Middle Britons, dwelling between Mercia and the Western Sea;[1] for, beyond all wont, were they striving against his sway. Then King Ethelwulf, as soon as he heard the errand, hasted him with his host, and brake into Britain [Wales], and King Burghred with him. And so soon as he was in, then harried he the land, and brought it all under Burghred, and so came home again.

§ 9. [8] And in that same year did King Ethelwulf send his aforenamed son Alfred to Rome, and many a peer with him, full worshipfully, and many a commoner. Pope Leo held then the Apostolic See;[2] and he it was who anointed for King this young Alfred; yea, and confirmed him also, and received him for his own son by adoption.

§ 10. [9] And in this same year did Earl Ealhere, with the men of Kent, and Huda, with the men of Surrey, stoutly turn to against a Heathen host in the island called in Saxon tongue Tenet [Thanet], but in British Ruim. At the first had the Christians the better; yet waxed the fight longer, notwithstanding; and on either side were full many slain, and full many were there plunged beneath the water and so drowned. And there both those earls perished.

§ 11. Also in the same year, after Easter, did Ethelwulf, King of the West Saxons, give his daughter in wedlock to Burghred, King of the Mercians; and at the town royal of Chippenham did he the wedding, and that with kingly worship.

§ 12. [10] In the 855th year of our Lord, and the 7th of the aforesaid King Alfred's age did Edmund the most glorious King of the East Angles begin to reign on Christmas Day, in the 14th year of his age. Also in this year died the Roman Emperor Lothair, son of the Emperor Louis the Pious. And in the same year there abode a mighty Heathen host for the whole winter in the aforesaid Isle of Sheppey.

[11] In the same year did the aforesaid worshipful King Ethelwulf free from all royal service and tribute a tenth part of all

1 *I.e.* in Wales, called the Middle Britons, as lying between the Cumbrians and the Cornish. Wales had first been brought under English sway by Offa. King of Mercia, but never permanently submitted till the days of Henry V.

2 See p. 15. Leo in a still extant letter calls Alfred *spiritalis filius*.

his realm; and by deed of gift [*graphio*][1] hallowed he it for ever to God, One and Three, on the Cross of Christ,[2] for the welfare of his own soul and the souls of his forefathers. And in the same year he wended him to Rome, with mickle worship, and with him he took Alfred, his son above-named, to tarry there yet a second time, inasmuch as he loved him beyond all his other sons. And there abode he by the space of one whole year. And thereafter came he back again to his own land, and brought with him as a bride Judith, daughter of Charles, King of the Franks.

§ 13. [12] In the meantime, while King Ethelwulf was thus for a short space abroad over-sea, there chanced in the parts west of Selwood a shameful hap, clean against all Christian wont and righteousness. For King Ethelbald, his son, and Ealhstan, Bishop of Sherborne, along with Eanwulf, Alderman of the shire of Summurton [Somerset], are said to have joined them together in this treason, that King Ethelwulf, at his home-coming from Rome, should never again be held for King. Many there be that count this wickedness, unheard of in all bygone days, to the Bishop and the Alderman only, and say that from their counsel the complot had its beginning. Many, however, count it wholly to the overboldness of the Etheling[3] Ethelbald, inasmuch as he held fast thereto and eke to many another crooked path; whereunto certain witness is borne, yea, and proved by the outcome that followed.

§ 14. For as King Ethelwulf was on his way back from Rome, this son of his aforesaid, with all his counseliors, or rather conspirators, were fain to do this wickedness of driving back the King from his own realm. But neither did God suffer it, nor the Lords of all Saxony [*i.e.* the Witan of Wessex] consent thereto. For lest a war between father and son should bring upon Saxony cureless ill; nay, lest the whole folk, taking side with either, should day by day wax ever sterner and starker in civil war; by the unspeakable kindness of the father, and the doom of the Lords one and all, the aforetime united kingdom was parted

1 This is a bit of Asser's Welsh phraseology. In Welsh *grief* signifies *inheritance*.

2 *I.e.* laying his finger on the cross of his signature. as is now done with the seal of a legal document. This method of attestation lasted till the Norman Conquest.

3 Etheling (from the root Ethel = Noble) is the Anglo-Saxon equivalent for a Prince, the son of a crowned King.

between the father and the son. And the Eastern shires were adjudged to the father, the Western to the son. For where the father of right should have reigned, there reigned that wicked and self-willed son (for the Western part of Saxony is ever counted above the Eastern).

§ 15. [13] Then, when King Ethelwulf got back from Rome, the whole folk, as was meet, were full glad of the old man's home-coming; and, if he would have suffered it, were fain to drive that self-willed son and his ill counsellors quite and clean from the realm. But he, as we have said, all too kindly and prudently, forbade them this, lest it should bring into hazard the safety of the realm. He bade, also, that Judith should sit beside him on his kingly throne (and that without any murmuring or ill-will of his Lords) even unto his life's end; against the perverse wont of that folk.

§ 16. For the West Saxon use suffereth not a Queen to sit beside a King, nor yet to call her 'Queen,' but 'Consort' only. And this insult, nay, infamy, as the elders of that land tell the tale, sprang from one self-willed and evil-hearted Queen of that folk, whose deeds were so wholly hateful to her lord and all the people, that not only won she such hatred as to be herself cast out from the royal throne, but left the same brand upon all that came after. For, because of her surpassing wickedness, the whole folk of that land sware with one accord that never in his life should any King reign over them if he were fain to bid his Queen sit beside him on the throne royal. And because, as I think, but few know whence this perverse and hateful custom, against the wont of all other folk (Teutonic [*Theotiscorum*] to wit), first arose in Saxony, I think good to set forth, at somewhat greater length, what I have heard thereon from my Lord and Master, Alfred the Truth-teller, King of the Anglo-Saxons, who ofttimes told me it himself, and that he had it from many a truthful tale which spake in full thereof.

§ 17. [14] There was in Mercia, of late [*moderno tempore*], a certain King of great might, dreaded by all the Kings and kingdoms around, by name Offa—he who bade make from sea to sea the great dyke[1] between Britain [Wales] and Mercia. His

[1] Still called Offa's Dyke, from the mouth of the Dee to that of the Wye. Offa was King of Mercia 755-794. Beorhtric died in the year 800.

daughter, named Eadburgh, did Beorhtric, King of the West Saxons, take unto him in wedlock. And she, so soon as she had gotten her the King's goodwill, and all but the whole sway of that realm, then began she, after her father's wise, to live as doth a tyrant. And against every man whom Beorhtric loved would she speak leasing, and whatsoever things be hateful to God and to man, such would she do. And all whom she might would she accuse unto the King, and thus take their life by her crafts, or their sway at the least. And if this she might not gain from the King, then took she them off by poison. And thus was it well proven as to a certain youth, dearly beloved of the King; for, when she might not belie him to the King, she worked his death by poison. And the King, all unwittingly, is said to have tasted of that poison (for she weened not to give it to him, but to the youth); but the King took it first, and thus both of them perished.

§ 18. [15] Therefore, when King Beorhtric was thus dead, seeing she might no longer dwell amongst the West Saxons, she sailed over sea, with countless treasures, and came unto Charles the Great, that most renowned King of the Franks. And to her, even as she stood before the daïs with many a royal gift which she had brought, Charles spake, and said: 'Choose thee, Eadburgh, which thou wilt, between me and my son, who standeth here on this daïs beside me.' And she, in her folly, without thought, answered and said unto him: 'If mine be the choice, then choose I thy son, insomuch as he is younger than thee.' Then did Charles laugh her to scorn, and said: 'Hadst thou chosen me, my son should have been thine; but since thou hast chosen my son, neither me nor him shalt thou have.' Yet gave he her a great Abbey of nuns, wherein she laid aside her secular habit and put on nun's garb, and for a few short years there held office as Abbess. But even as in her own land she had lived a witless life, so lived she in another a life yet more witless. For with a certain man of her own kin did she commit adultery, and being taken in the very act, was, by the bidding of King Charles, cast forth from her monastery. And, in want and misery, led she, even unto death, a life of shame: so that at last, with but one little page beside her, as we have heard from many who saw it, dwelt she in all wretchedness, begging her daily bread, at Padua.[1]

[1] This sounds strange, but is quite possible. If Edaburgh was in her teens when married (in 789), she might be still alive in 850, well within Asser's day.

§ 19. [16] Ethelwulf, then, lived, after he got back from Rome, two years; wherein, among many another good thought for this present life, he dwelt upon his own going of the way of all flesh [*ad universitatis viam*]. And lest his sons after their father's death should strive unseemly amongst themselves, he bade write a will or rather a commendatory letter, wherein he wrote this doom, that his kingdom be meetly shared between two sons, the eldest to wit; and his private heritage between his sons and his daughter; and the moneys he might leave, between his sons and his soul, and eke his nobles. Of which Act of Prudence we think meet to give a few words (that many hereafter may follow the same)—such, to wit, as have most to do with soul's health. For the rest, which pertain unto human stewardship, it boots not to bring into this small work; lest our prolixity disgust our readers—to say nothing of those who hear it read.

§ 20. For his soul's health, then, (whereof he was ever jealous even from his youth up), bade he that throughout all his own heritage, in every ten manors [*manentibus*] one poor man, either of inland folk or outland, should be stayed with food, drink and clothing by his successors, even unto the final Day of Judgment; yet so only if that land should still be dwelt upon, with men and flocks therein, and should not be waste. To Rome also, for his soul, bade he bear, in each and every year, much moneys, even 300 mancuses;[1] and that these should be shared after this sort, namely, 100 in honour of St. Peter, more especially for buying of oil, wherewith might be filled all the lamps of the church of that Apostle on Easter Eve, and also at the Cock-crow [on Christmas Day], and 100 in honour of St. Paul, to the same ends, and 100 also for the Universal Apostolic Pope.

§ 21. [17] But when King Ethelwulf was dead, and buried at Stemruga [Steyning],[2] Ethelbald his son, against the ban of God and Christian worthiness—nay, and against all Heathen wont also—went up unto his father's couch, and took to him in wedlock Judith, daughter of Charles, King of the Franks; wherethrough all

1 The word is of Arabic origin. A mancuss was thirty pence, and (as a labourer's daily wage was then 1d.) equivalent to half-a-crown now. Thus the mancus was worth about £4 10s., and Ethelwulf's 'Rome-scot' towards £1500 a year. See Simeon of Durham, §7 (note).

2 The A.S. Chronicle says 'he lieth at Winchester.' But he may have been translated thither.

who heard thereof cried 'Fie upon him!' And for two and a half lawless [*effrenis*] years, after the death of his father, swayed he the helm of the West Saxon kingdom.

§ 22. [18] In A.D. 860, the 12th of the age of Alfred, Ethelbald, King of the West Saxons, died, and was buried in Sherborne; and Ethelbert, his brother, as right was, joined beneath his sway Kent and Surrey, yea, and Sussex likewise. In his days came there from the sea a mighty Heathen host, and stormed Winchester [*Wintonia*], and laid waste the city. And while, with all their spoil, they made back to their ships, came there upon them Oswald, Alderman of Hampshire, with his men, and Ethelwulf the Alderman with the men of Berkshire, and in manly wise crossed their path. Eftsoon joined the battle, and on all sides were the Heathen cut down. And, seeing they might abide the fray no longer, they fled them away like women, and the Christians won that field.

[19] So for five years did Ethelbert sway the realm, in all peace and love and honour; and, to the great grief of his folk, went he the way of all flesh, and in Sherborne, beside his brother, was he worshipfully laid to rest.

§ 23. [20] In the year of our Lord's Incarnation 865, the Heathen wintered in the island of Thanet, and plighted sure troth unto the men of Kent, whereby the men of Kent, for the keeping of that troth, promised to give them money. Yet meanwhile, in fox-like sort, did the Heathen steal out from their camp by night, and brake the troth, and held in scorn that promised fee (for they knew well they would get more by thieving and spoil than by the peace). And the whole of East Kent did they lay waste.

§ 24. [21] In the year of our Lord's Incarnation 866, the 18th of King Alfred's age, Ethelred, brother of King Ethelbert, undertook, for five years, the sway of the West Saxon realm. And that same year came there from Denmark to Britain a mighty Heathen fleet, and wintered in the kingdom of the Eastern Saxons, which in the Saxon tongue is called Eastengle. And there was that host, for the most part, horsed.

§ 25. But, to speak in sea fashion (lest all too long our ship yield her to wind and tide, and all too far tack about in the offing, ever wearing around amid such wars and slaughters and tale of years), I hold that we should go back to that which most stirred me to this work. That is to say, I think that here should be shortly

brought in the little that has come to my knowledge of the childhood and boyhood of my worshipful lord and master Alfred, King of the Anglo-Saxons.

§ 26. [22] Beloved was he, by both father and mother alike, with a great love, beyond all his brethren;—yea, and the darling of all. And in the kingly court was he ever brought up. As he grew on, both in childhood and boyhood, so showed he ever fairer than his brethren, and, in looks, and words, and ways, the lovesomest. From his very cradle, above all, and amid all the distractions of this present life, his own high-souled temper, and his high birth also, bred in him a longing after Wisdom. But, alas, through the unworthy carelessness of his parents and up-bringers, he abode, even unto his twelfth year or more, unable so much as to say his letters. Yet learnt he by heart many a Saxon lay, for, day and night, would he hear them repeated by others, and no dull listener was he. A keen huntsman also, ever at work in woodcraft, and to good purpose. For peerless was he in the hunting-field, ever the first and ever the luckiest; in this, as in all else, supremely gifted by God. And this we have ourselves ofttimes seen.

§ 27. [23] It chanced then that one day his mother was showing to him and his brothers a book of Saxon songcraft which she had in her hand. 'Whichever of you,' said she, 'can soonest learn this volume, to him will I give it.' At this word, he, instinct with divine inspiration, and allured by the beauty of the opening letter of that book, answered his mother, forestalling his brethren, his elders in years but not in grace, and said: 'Wilt thou indeed give one of us this book—and to him who can soonest understand and repeat it before thee?' Then did she smile for very joy, and 'Yea,' she said, 'that I will.' Then at once took he the book from her hand, went off to his master, and he read it.[1] And when it was read, he took it back to his mother and said it all by heart.

§ 28. [24] After this he learnt the Daily Course, that is, the Services of the Hours, and then certain psalms, and many prayers, which he collected into one book and ever bare about with him in his bosom (as I have seen with my own eyes) day and night, for the

1 *I.e.* the master read it, and Alfred, with his wondrous diligence and memory thus learnt it by heart. This is the most probable solution of the inconsistency with the last paragraph, which states that he did not even know his letters till he was 12. His mother must have died before he was 6, seeing that his father married again in 855.

sake of prayer, amid all the changes and chances [*curricula*] of this mortal life, and never parted therefrom.

§ 29. But, alas, what he most longed for, a liberal education to wit, he attained not according unto his will, for why, as he used to say, there were then no good teachers [*lectores*] in the whole realm of Wessex.

[25] And oft would he affirm, with many a complaint, and many a sigh from his inmost heart, that amid all the hindrances of his mortal life this was the greatest, that at the period when he had both years and leisure and capacity for learning, he had no masters. But when he was more advanced in age, he was a prey, day and night, to pangs unceasing, past the skill of all physicians within the four seas, and to all the cares, outward and inward, of kinghood, and to the inroads, by sea and land, of the Heathen; so that his masters and teachers, such as they were, were so distracted, that read [*i.e.* study] he could not. But yet, amid the hindrances of this life, from infancy even unto the present day, he hath ever continued in this heartfelt longing, yea, even until now he ceaseth not to yearn for it, and will, as I believe, unto the very last day of his life.

§ 30. [26] In the year of the Incarnation 867, the 19th of the age of King Alfred aforesaid, the above-named host of the Heathen shifted from East Anglia to the city of York, which lieth on the northern bank of the river Humber.

[27] At that time, by the stirring of the devil, had there arisen strife among the Northumbrians; as to a folk which hath come into God's displeasure is ever wont to chance. For the Northumbrians of late, as we have said, had driven from the realm their lawful King, Osbert by name; and a certain usurper, by name Ella, not of the seed royal, had they set up over the kingdom. But when the heathen came upon them, this strife, by the counsel of God and the help of the Lords of the land, was somewhat allayed, for the common weal. And Osbert and Ella joined forces, and gathered an army, and drew nigh to the town of York.

§ 31. And at their coming the Heathen took at once to flight, and were fain to defend themselves within the city walls. And when the Christians saw their flight, they started in chase, even to within the ramparts, and would break down the wall; and they did it too. For hitherto, up to that time, the walls of that city were

weak and decayed. But when the Christians, according to their purpose, had broken down the wall, and great part of them had made their way, along with the Heathen, into the city, the Heathen, for very need, charged them with fury, cut them down, put them to flight, and crushed them utterly, within the town and without. And there for the most part were all the Northumbrians taken as in a trap. Both the Kings were slain, and many of the Lords; and, in a word, they were annihilated [*deleti*]. And the rest who escaped plighted peace with the Heathen.

[28] In the same year did Ealhstan, Bishop of the church of Sherborne, go the way of all flesh, after ruling his see for 50 years in all honour; and at Sherborne was he buried in peace.

§ 32. [29] In the year of our Lord's Incarnation 868, the 20th of the age of Alfred, the aforesaid worshipful King Alfred, then holding but secondary rank, wooed [*expetivit*] and wed [*subarravit*] a wife from Mercia, high of birth, the daughter of Ethelred, Alderman of the Gainas,[2] whom men called Mucill.[3] And her mother's name was Eadburgh, of the blood-royal of Mercia; whom I myself ofttimes saw with my own eyes for not a few years before her decease, a venerable lady in sooth, who, after the loss of her husband, abode for many years a widow, in all chastity, even unto death.

§ 33. [30] In the same year the aforesaid Heathen host left the Northumbrians and wended them to *Snotengaham* [Nottingham], which in British is, being interpreted,[4] *Tigguocobauc*, but in Latin *Speluncarum Domus* [cave-stead]; and there that year they wintered. Then at their coming did Burghred, King of the Mercians, and all the Lords of that folk, at once send messengers to Ethelred, King of the West Saxons, and Alfred his brother begging and praying for help, wherethrough they might fight the aforesaid host. And their quest was full soon sped. For the

1 From *arrha* = pledge. Pliny connects this word specially with the wedding ring.

2 This otherwise unknown name may be connected with Gainsborough in Lindsey, then a Mercian district.

3 Probable = *muckle*, 'The big.'

4 Asser's English seems at fault here, for, though Tigguocobauc does = Cave-stend in old Welsh, the English name cannot be derived from any known word for cave. In all ages the soft sandstone of Nottingham has lent itself to cave dwelling.

brethren [Ethelred and Alfred] granted thereto; and, while the word was yet in their mouths, gathered from all their land a numberless host, and gat them into Mercia, and were at Nottingham, seeking war with one accord. Yet did the Heathen, in their stronghold on the citadel, refuse battle; neither could the Christians break through the wall thereof. Thus peace was made between the Mercians and the Heathen, and those two brethren with their troops turned them home again.

§ 34. [31] In the year of our Lord's Incarnation 869, and 21st of King Alfred's age, was there a mighty famine, and death among men, and plague among beasts. And the aforesaid Heathen host rode back to the Northumbrians and came to the city of York, and there abode one whole year.

[32] And in the next year (870) they made their way through Mercia to East Anglia, and in a place called Theodford [Thetford] they wintered. [33] In this same year Edmund, King of the East Angles, fought against that same host a desperate fight. But, alas, the Heathen won all too proudly; and there was he slain, and the most of his men with him; and they held the death-stead, and brought beneath their sway all that land.

[34] And in the same year did Archbishop Ceolnoth, the Bishop of *Dorobernia* [Canterbury], go the way of all flesh, and in that ctty was he buried in peace.

§ 35. [35] But in the year of our Lord's Incarnation 871, and the 22nd of the age of King Alfred, did that Heathen host, hateful to tell, leave the East Angles, and hied them to the realm of the West Saxons, and came unto a town royal, called *Rædig* [Reading], which lieth on the bank of Thames-stream River [*Tamesis flumensis fluminis*] to the south, in that part which is called Berkshire. And on the third day of their coming thither, then rode forth their chiefs, and many with them, to harry the land; and the rest were after making them a dyke between the two rivers, Thames and *Cynetan* [Kennet], on the right hand[1] of that town royal.

§ 36. Then did Ethelwulf, Alderman of the land of Berkshire, with his comrades, cross their path at the place called Englefield; and there fought both sides full valiantly, and long did either stand

[1] *I.e.* to the South. Until the sixteenth century the East, not the North, was the top of a map. To this day in Welsh the single word *deheir* means both *right* and *south*.

their ground. Of the two Heathen captains the one was slain, and the most part of that host laid low. Then fled away the rest, and the Christians gat them the victory, and held the death-stead.

[36] Yet four days more after this hap and there came Ethelred, King of the West Saxons, and Alfred his brother, and joined forces, and gathered them a host, and drew nigh unto Reading, cutting down and overthrowing whomsoever of the Heathen they found without the stronghold, and made their way even unto the gates. No less keen in fight were the Heathen. Out they burst from every gate like wolves; and then waxed long the fight, and ever more deadly. But, alas, alas, in the end did the Christians turn their backs, and the Heathen gat them the victory and held the death-stead. And there, amongst the rest, fell the above-named Alderman Ethelwulf.

§ 37. [37] Stirred by this woe and shame, the Christians, after yet another four days, went forth to battle against the aforesaid host, at a place called *Æscesdun* [Ashdown] (which in Latin is by interpretation Ash Mount),[1] with their whole strength, and with a good will. But the Heathen formed in two divisions, of like size, made ready their shield-wall [*testudo*]. For they had, as at that time, two Kings and many Chieftains; and the one half of their army gave they unto the two Kings, and the rest unto all the Chieftains together. And when the Christians saw this, they too, in like manner, parted their host in twain, and as keenly formed their shield-wall.

§ 38. But Alfred, with his men, as we have heard from truthful eye-witnesses, came the quicker to the field and more readily. Nor wonder was it; for his brother King Ethelred was still in his tent, fixed in prayer, hearing Mass. For ever would he say that never while he lived would he leave his mass before the Priest had ended it, nor, for any man on earth, turn his back on Divine Service. And even so he did. And much availed with the Lord the faith of that Christian King, as in what followeth will appear most plainly.

§ 39. [38] The Christians, then, had thought best that Ethelred the King, with his force, should take battle against the two Kings of the Heathen; while Alfred his brother, with his band, should be

1 It is unlikely that this is the real derivation. Modern sentiment connects the battle with the famous white horse near Ashbury. But the name is applied by the A. S. Chronicle (1006) to the whole range of the White Horse downs. Lysons finds the battlefield at Ashampstead near Compton.

told, as was meet, to chance the fight [*belli sumere sortem*] against all the Heathen Chieftains. And when thus on either side they were in good order, and the King tarried long in prayer, Alfred, then second in command, could stand the advance of the foe no longer. Needs must he either draw him back from the battle, or charge the enemy ere yet his brother came into the fray. And, at the last, in manly wise, charged he, with the rush of a wild boar, leading his Christian forces against the foemen's hosts, even as had been fore-planned (save only that the King was not yet come), for he trusted in God's counsel and leant upon His aid. So drew he together his shield-wall in good order, and advanced his banner straight against the foe.

§ 40. [39] But here those who know not the place must be told that it was no fair field of battle, for the Heathen had seized the higher ground, and the Christian battle-line was charging uphill. There was also in that same place a lone thorn-tree[1] and a low, which we ourselves have beheld. Around this, then, came the lines together, with a mighty shouting, in warrior wise, the one side bent upon all mischief [*perperam agentes*], the other to fight for life and land and dear ones. This way and that swayed the battle for a while, valiant was it and all too deadly, till so God ordered it that the Heathen could stand against the Christian charge no longer. Most part of their force were slain, and with all shame they betook them to flight.

§ 41. And in that place fell there by the sword one of the two Heathen Kings, and of their Chieftains five, and many a thousand of their men beside them. Yea, and, moreover, thousands more, scattered over the whole breadth of the field of Ashdown, were cut to pieces far and wide. And there then fell there Bægsceg their King, and Sidroc the Elder, their Chieftain, and Sidroc the Younger, their Chieftain, and Osbern the Chieftain, and Frena the Chieftain, and Harold the Chieftain. And the whole Heathen host fled them away all that day and all that night, even unto the next day; till they that escaped got back into their stronghold.[2] And even until nightfall held the Christians the chase, and smote them down on every side.

1 Doomsday gives Nachededorne (*i.e.* Naked or Lone Thorn) as the name of the Hundred (now called Compton Hundred) which includes Ashampstead.

2 At Reading (§ 35), some 10 miles from Ashampstead. It would be 30 from Ashbury, where the White Horse is popularly supposed to mark the field.

§ 42. [40] And after this,[1] again fourteen days, Ethelred the King and Alfred his brother, with their united force, hied them to Basing to fight against the Heathen. There joined they battle, and stood to it long. But the Heathen gained the day and held the field. And when this fray was lost and won, came there from over sea yet another Heathen host and joined the horde.[2]

[41] And in the same year, after Easter, Ethelred, the aforesaid King, after ruling his realm well and worshipfully amid many a trouble, went the way of all flesh, and is buried in the monastery at Wimborne, where he awaiteth the Coming of the Lord and the First Resurrection with the just.

§ 43. [42] In the same year did our Alfred (who until then, while his brothers lived, had been in the second place) take upon him, so soon as ever his brother was dead, the sway of the whole kingdom, by the grant of God, and with all goodwill of the land-folk, one and all. For even while this brother was yet alive might he eftsoon have won it, would he have taken it, and that with the assent of all men: seeing that both in wisdom and eke in all good ways was he better than all his brethren put together—yea, and, in especial, a surpassing warrior, and, in war, had ever almost the best of it. Then began he to reign, as it were unwillingly. For it seemed unto him that never might he, all alone, with but God for aid, endure so grievous a stress and strain of heathendom; whenas, even along with his brothers, while they lived, full hardly and with great loss might he abide it.

§ 44. So reigned he one full month, and thereafter, on the hill called Wilton, on the southern bank of the river *Guilou*[3] [Willy] (from which river the whole of that shire is named), fought he, with but few behind him, against the whole Heathen host, a fight all too unequal. Up and down most part of the day raged the fight full stoutly. Then were the eyes of the Heathen opened, and they saw to the full their peril. And therewith bore they up no longer against their unremitting foe, but turned their backs and fled away.

1 Here the MS. has an ungrammatical and unfinished sentence: '*Quibus cum talia præsentis irtae di pendia alienigenis perperam quærentibus non sufficerent.*' This appears to mean 'And as such losses were not enough for these wrong-seeking Philistines.'

2 At Reading. Asser has left out the Battle of Merton.

3 This is a Welsh form.

But, alas, through the rashness of the pursuit they tricked us.[1] On they came again to battle, and won the victory, and were masters of the death-stead.

§ 45. Nor let this seem strange to any that in this fight the tale of Christians was but small. For the Saxons, as a people [*populariter*], were all but worn out by eight[2] battles in one and the self-same year against the Heathen; wherein one Heathen King and nine of their Chieftains, and of their troops untold numbers, were cut to pieces; to say nothing of the numberless raids, daily and nightly, which our oft-named Alfred and many a Captain of his kin, each with his own men, and many even of the King's Thanes, would ever keenly and tirelessly make against the Heathen. How many thousands of Heathen were slain in these never-ending raids, over and above those cut down in the eight battles, God alone knoweth.

[43] Also in that same year did the Saxons make peace with the Heathen on this one condition, that they should depart from them [*i.e.* out of Wessex]. And this they fulfilled.

§ 46. [44] In the year of the Lord's Incarnation 872, the 23rd of Alfred's age, the aforesaid Heathen host wended them to London, and the Mercians made peace with them.

[45] And in the next year they left London, and went right into the land of the Northumbrians, and there wintered in a place called Lindesige,[3] and the Mercians once more made peace with them.

[46] And the next year again they left Lindesige, and made their way into Mercia, and there at a place called Repton [*Hreopdune*] did they winter. Burghred, moreover, the King of the Mercians, drave they to leave his kingdom and go over seas into exile, and hie him to Rome, in the 22nd year of his reign. And full loth was he so to do; and after he got to Rome he lived not there long, but died, and in the School of the Saxons[4] in the Church of St. Mary, was he buried worshipfully, and awaiteth the Coming of the Lord and the First Resurrection with the just.

1 *Per audacitem persequentium decipientes.* The Chronicle of St. Neot's reads *paucitatem perseoquentium despicientes*, which may be right.

2 There were really nine battles this year. Asser has left out Merton.

3 The A.S. Chronicle says: 'Torksey in Lindisay' (*i.e.* North Lincolnshire). Asser is wrong in assigning this district to Northumbria.

4 See p. 85.

And after his driving out, the Heathen got under their sway the whole Mercian kingdom; yet did they grant it in trust to a certain foolish King's Thane (Ceolwulf by name), on these miserable terms, that whensoever they might wish to have it again, he should, at a day's notice, give them quiet and peaceable possession thereof. And in this troth he gave them sureties, and sware, moreover, that never would he cross their will, but be obedient unto them in all things.

§ 47. [47] In the year of the Incarnation 875, the 25th of King Alfred's age, the host so often above spoken of left Repton and parted them into two bands. The one, with Healfdene, went off into the land of the Northumbrians, and there wintered near the river called Tyne. And they brought under their sway all Northumbria; yea, and harried the Picts and the Strathclyde folk. And the other, with Guthrum and Oscytel and Osmund, three Heathen Kings, came unto the place which is called Cambridge [*Grantebrycge*]; and there they wintered.

[48] And in this same year King Alfred, in a ship fight on the sea, engaged six Heathen ships. And one of them he took, and the rest slipped away and fled.

§ 48. [49] In the year of our Lord's Incarnation 876, the 26th of King Alfred's age, the oft-named Heathen host, setting out from Cambridge by night, made their way into a stronghold called Wareham, which is an Abbey of nuns, and lieth between two rivers, the Frome and the Trent,[1] in the land called in British *Durngueis*, but in Saxon *Thornsæta*[2] [Dorset]. It is the safest spot on earth, save only towards the west, where it adjoins the land. And with this host did King Alfred plight firm troth, on these terms, that they should leave his land. And the host, without a word of gainsaying, gave up to him chosen sureties, named by himself alone. Yea, and they sware an oath on all the relics wherein the King placed (after God) his chiefest trust—yea, and on their ring,[3] whereon heretofore never would they swear to any folk—that they would get them out of his realm with all speed. Yet, after their wont, dealt they treacherously, and recked nought of sureties, or oath, or promise, or honour: but one night brake

1 More commonly called the Piddle. But the village of Piddletrenthide preserves Asser's name.

2 This ought to be *Dornsæta* (from the Roman name *Durnovaria*).

3 See p. 26.

their troth every mounted man they had, and suddenly hied them thence West[1] to Devonshire [*Damnonia*], to a place which is called in Saxon *Eaxanceastre* [Exeter], but in British *Cairuisc*,[2] and in Latin *Exonia*, a city on the east bank of the river Exe [*Uisc*], lying near the South Sea which runs betwixt Gaul and Britain. And there they wintered.

§ 49. [50] In the same year also Halfdene, King of those parts, shared out the whole land of the Northumbrians between himself and his men; and tilled it, he and his host.

In the same year Rollo and his men made their way into Normandy.[3]

§ 50. [51] In the year 877, the Heathen, as autumn-tide drew on, in part sat them down at Exeter, and in part went back to raid in Mercia. Day by day the number of the miscreants [*perversi*] grew ever larger, so that were thirty thousand slain in one day others would take their place twicetold. Then bade King Alfred make barks [*cymbas*] throughout the realm, and keels [*galeas*], that is long ships, that he might meet the foes in sea-fight, as they came in. Therein embarked he adventurers [*piratos*] and let them keep the water-way [*vias maris*]. But himself hied he with all speed to Exeter, where the Heathen were wintering, and shut them up in that city, and besieged them. On his seamen also laid he strait command, that they should suffer no supplies to reach the foe by way of the Narrow Seas [*in parte freti*].

51. [52] Then met there his seamen 120 ships, laden with armed warriors, coming to the help of their kinsfolk [*concivium*]. And when the King's officers found ships thus filled with Heathen warmen, then leapt they to arms, and boarded the savages like men. But the Heathen, who now for nearly a month had been wave-tossed and ship-worn, vainly returned the onset. So that in a moment their line of battle was shattered [*lacerata*], and sunken in the place called Swanwich [Swanage]; and they perished one and all.

1 By a mistake in the MS. between *occidentem* and *occidit* endless confusion has been here introduced. Asser's words, as they stand, make the Danes kill their own horsemen. The absurdity of this has caused desperate emendations. But the Chronicle of St. Neot's preserves the true reading.

2 Exeter was half Welsh even in the reign of Athelstane.

3 This sentence and the two following sections are interpolated from the Chronicles of St. Neot's. So are sections 53-57 and 60.

§ 52. In the year of the Incarnation 868, the 30th of the age of Alfred, the oft-mentioned host left Exeter, and came unto Chippenham, a town-royal in the North of Wiltshire [*Wiltunscyre*], on the east bank of the river which in British is called Avon, and there they wintered. And many of the country-folk drave they, by force of arms, and through need and fear, to sail beyond seas, and, for the most part, brought they under their sway all that dwelt in that land.

§ 53. [53] At that same time Alfred, with a few of his lords, and some warriors also, dwelt in the woods and fens [*gronnosa*] of Somerset—a life of sore trouble and unrest. For he had nought whereon to live save only what he might carry off, either by force or stealth, from the Heathen; or even from the Christians who had bowed to their sway.

§ 54. And, as is written in the Life of Holy Father Neot, once, in the house of one of his cowherds, it chanced that one day a country-wife (the wife, indeed, of that same cowherd), was making ready to bake cakes. And the King sat thus by the hearth, and would make ready his bow and arrows and other war-gear. But when that unhappy woman saw that the cakes she had put before the fire were burning, she hasted and ran and moved them, scolding the while at our all-conquering King, and saying,[1] 'Fie, fellow!'

> 'And why so slack to move the cakes? And can'st not see them burn?
> Thou'rt all too glad to eat them up, when they are done to a turn.'

Little thought that unlucky woman that this was King Alfred, who waged so many wars against the Heathen, and won over them so many victories.

§ 55. Yet not only to that glorious King did the Lord deign to grant victory over his foes, and weal out of woe. Often and often [*multotiens*] did that same Lord, of His loving-kindness, suffer him to be vexed by his foes, to be struck down by mishaps, to be lowered in the eyes of his folk. And this, that he might know that there is One Lord of all, to Whom every knee shall bow, in Whose hand is the heart of Kings, Who putteth down the mighty from their seat and exalteth the humble and meek, Who willeth that His faithful, high-placed in all wealth, should be touched sometimes

[1] 'Heus homo!
Urere quos cernis panes gyrare moraris,
Cum nimium gaudes hos manducare calentes?'
These lines may be the relic of some early poetical account of the adventure.

with the scourge of adversity;—that, when brought low, they despair not of God's mercy, and, when lifted up, they pride them not on their earthly honours, but know to Whom they owe all things whatsoever they have.

§ 56. And this trouble, in such wise brought upon our King, came upon him, as we believe, not undeservedly. For in the early days of his kingship, while he was yet young, he was a slave [*detentus*] to youthful temper. And his men and his subjects came unto him, and sought to him, each for his own need; and they who were wronged by the authorities besought his help and protection. Yet would he not list to them, nor pain him at all to help them, but altogether made nought of them.

§ 57. Whereat that most blessed man Neot, while yet on earth, being his near kin, was grieved to the very heart, and, being full of the spirit of prophecy, foretold that, for this thing, there would come upon him very grievous trouble. But he recked little of the kind reproof of the man of God, and took not to heart that most true prophecy. Seeing then that whatsoever a man sinneth must needs be someway punished, either here or hereafter, our true and loving Judge willed that the King's folly should not go unpunished in this world, that He might spare him in the Day of Judgment. Therefore did this same Alfred of ours oft-times fall into such wretchedness, that none of his subjects knew where he was nor what had become of him.

§ 58. [**54**] In the same year the brother of Ingwar and Halfdene,[1] with 23 ships, sailed forth from the land of *Demetia* [South Wales], where they had wintered, after much slaughter of Christians, unto *Damnonia* [Devon]. And there, while bent on mischief, was he slain, with 1,200 more, by the King's Thanes, before the stronghold of Cynuit[2]—an ill death. For in that same stronghold had many King's Thanes, with their men, shut themselves for refuge. But though the Heathen saw that the stronghold was unprepared and wholly unfortified, save that it had mere ramps raised after our wont, yet tried they not to storm it. For the place is safe, by its situation, quite safe, on every side except the East, as I have seen myself. They sat down, then, before it, thinking that the folk

1 Probably the famous Hubba.

2 Traditionally, near Bideford. But see Gaimar, L. 3141.

within must speedily surrender, under stress of hunger, and thirst, and siege; for that stronghold hath no water nigh unto it.

§ 59. It fell out, however, otherwise than they thought for. For the Christians, rather than endure such utter lack and need—stirred up, moveover, by God—deemed it better by far either to conquer or to die. At dawn of day break they out all suddenly with the dash of a wild boar [*aprino tempore*] upon the foemen, and overthrew them utterly. Down went the King; down went his men, almost all; and but few they were who got off and fled them away to their ships.

§ 60. And there gat they no small spoil, wherein they took moreover that banner which men call the Raven. For they say that the three sisters of Ingwar and Hubba, the daughters, sooth to say, of Lodbrock, wove that banner, and made it all wholly ready between morn and night in one single day. They say too that in every fight, wherein that flag went before them, if they were to win the raven in the midst thereof would seem to flutter as it were alive. But were their doom to be worsted, then would it droop, still and lifeless. And oft was this well proven.

§ 61. [55] In the same year, after Easter, did King Alfred and a few of his comrades make them a stronghold at a spot called Athelney. And from that stronghold ever waged he, with his Thanes and vassals of Somerset, tireless war against the Heathen yoke. Next, in the seventh week after Easter, rode he to Egbert's Stone,[1] which is to the East of the forest called Selwood[2] (in Latin, *Silva Magna*, in British, *Coitmawr*). And there met him all the whole folk of Somersetshire and Wiltshire and all the folk of Hampshire, such as had not, through fear of the Heathen, sailed beyond seas. And when they saw the King, they were filled with joy untold, and they hailed him as one alive again from the dead; —as, after such mighty troubles, was full meet. And there camped they one night.

§ 62. [56] And at peep of dawn did the King rouse the camp, and came to a place called Acglea,[3] and there one night he encamped.

1 Perhaps the 'Three Shire Stone' of Somerset, Wilts., and Dorset.

2 This forest ran along the still well-wooded ridge which divides Wilts. from Somerset. In O. E. days it was so important a feature that the Bishopric of Sherborne is even called Selwood-shire.

3 See p. 38.

And next day, very early in the morning, he advanced his banners, and came to a place called *Ethandun* [Edington, in Wiltshire].[1] And there against the whole Heathen host formed he firm his shield-wall, and fought a deadly fight. Stoutly and long kept they at it; and, by God's help, in the end he got the victory, and laid low the Heathen with a very great slaughter, and followed hard upon their flight, with blow on blow, even unto their stronghold.[2] And everything without the stronghold, men to wit, and horses, and herds, caught he and took, and the men he slew at once; and before the gates of the Heathen stronghold did he and all his host take camp, like men.

§ 63. And when he had there tarried 14 days, the Heathen, anhungred, and a-cold, and a-dread, and, at last, hopeless, became sore afraid, and begged for peace, on this troth, that the King should name and take from them such sureties as he would, giving them none in return. Never before had they made peace with anyone after this sort.

§ 64. And, when he had heard their message, the King, stirred thereto by his own kind heart [*suatim utens:* as we now say 'On his own'] named and took from them such sureties as he would; and, when he had them, the Heathen sware as well that they would depart from his realm with all the speed they might. Yea, and Guthrum, their King, pledged him to become a Christian, and to take upon him Baptism at the hand of King Alfred. And all this he and his fulfilled, even as they had promised.

§ 65. For after seven weeks came Guthrum, King of the Heathen, with the thirty choicest men of all his host, to King Alfred, at a place, near Athelney, called *Alre* [Aller]. And there did King Alfred receive him for his own son by adoption, and raised him up from out the baptismal font. And his chrisom-loosing was on the eighth day, in the town-royal called Wedmore. And, when he was baptized, then stayed he with the King twelve nights. And the King gave to him and all his men many excellent gifts, in great

1 Bishop Clifford's theory that the battle was at the Somersetshire Edington (near Athelney) is hardly possible. With the Danes at Chippenham, the men of Wilts. and Hants. would never have mustered so far West.

2 This may have been the prehistoric earthwork of Bratton Castle, on the projecting brow marked by the White Horse of Westbury. This is close to the field of battle. But the long pursuit implied by Asser rather points to the Danish Headquarters at Chippenham (see § 52), some 10 miles to the North.

plenty, for their support and edification withal[1] [*plurima atque optima ædificia*].

§ 66. [57] In the year of our Lord's Incarnation 879 (the 28th [31st] of King Alfred's age), the aforesaid Heathen host gat them up, as they had promised, from Chippenham, and hied them to Cirencester, which is called in British *Caerceri*, in the southern part of the Huiccas. And there abode they one year.

[58] In the same year came there a mighty host of Heathen sailing from over-sea [*ultramarinis*], and into Thames-stream, and joined them to the above host. Yet wintered they in the place called Fulham upon the Thames.

[59] In the same year was there an eclipse of the sun,[2] between Nones and Vespers, but nearer the Nones.

§ 67. [60] In the year of our Lord's Incarnation 880 (the 29th [32nd] of King Alfred's age), the oft-mentioned Heathen host left Cirencester, and went off into East Anglia, and shared up that land among them, and began to settle down there.

[61] In the same year the Heathen host which had wintered at Fulham left the island of Britain and once more crossed the sea, and got to Eastern France and abode for one year at a place called Ghent [*Gaent*]. [62] And the next year [881] went they up further into France; and the Franks fought against them; and, when the battle was done, the Heathen found them horses, and became horsemen. [63] And in the next year [882] they towed their ships up the river Meuse [*Mese*], and drew much further up into France, and there wintered one year.

§ 68. [64] In the same year Alfred, King of the Anglo-Saxons, met in sea-fight with the Heathen ships upon the sea. And of them he took two ships, and slew every man therein. And the captains of yet two more ships, with all their mates, laid down their arms—so worn out were they with war and wounding—and bowed the knee, and with humble prayers gave themselves up to the King.

[65] And in the next year [883] the aforesaid host towed their ships, against the stream, up the river Scheldt [*Scald*] to an Abbey of nuns called Condé [*Cundoht*], and there abode one year.

1 This seems the most probable meaning. In classical Latin *ædifico* and its derivatives never have a symbolical sense, which is first found in the Vulgate.

2 There was a solar eclipse in March, 879, but this was all but invisible in England. Asser is probably referring to the great total eclipse of 29th October, 878, in the early afternoon. N.B.—The office of Nones was usually said at Mid-day (whence our 'Noon'), and Vespers at 3 or after.

§ 69. [66] In the year of our Lord's Incarnation 884, the 34th [36th] of King Alfred, the aforesaid host parted into two bands. The one band went on into Eastern France, and the other came into Britain and drew unto Kent, and laid siege to the city, called, in Saxon, Rochester [*Hrofesceastre*], lying on the eastern bank of the River Medway. There before the gate did the Heathen suddenly throw up a strong work. Yet could they not take the city, for the citizens held out like men, until King Alfred came up with a great army to their aid. Then did the Heathen leave their stronghold, and all the horses which they had brought over from France, yea, and let go most of their captives in the stronghold; for the King came upon them as in a moment, and they fled, without stay, to their ships. And both captives and horses were seized and shared upon the spot, by the Saxons. But the Heathen, under stress of utter need, that same summer went off into France once more.

§ 70. [67] In the same year [884] Alfred manned well his fleet with war-men and sent them across from Kent, with orders to harry East Anglia. And when they came to the mouth of the River Stour, all at once there met them 13 Heathen ships, cleared for action. Then began a sea-fight, and on either side was it waged full keenly. And the Heathen were slain, one and all; and all their ships taken and all the spoil therein. And thereafter when the King's fleet was returning[1] after its victory, the Heathen who dwelt in East Anglia, gat them ships together on every hand, and bore down upon this same fleet in the mouth of this same river. And they joined battle; and the Heathen had the victory.

§ 71. [68] In the same year [884], Carloman, King of the East Franks while boar-hunting, was piteously done to death by the charge of a wild boar [*singulari congressione*],[2] which gashed him horribly with its tusk. His brother Louis [*Hlothuicus*] died the year before, and he too was King of the Franks. For both were sons of Louis, King of the Franks, who died in the year of the abovementioned eclipse [879-80]. And this Louis was son of

1 The MS. has here *dormiret* instead of *domum iret*, which the A.S. Chronicle shows to be the right reading.

2 *Singularis* signifies in late Latin a solitary (and therefore specially dangerous) wild boar. Hence the French *sanglier*. It is a translation of the Greek μόνιος.

Charles, King of the Franks, whose daughter Judith, Ethelwulf, King of the West Saxons, took, with her father's goodwill, to be his queen.

§ 72. [69] In the same year also, a mighty host of Heathens came out of Germany even unto the land of the Old Saxons, which in Saxon is called Ealdseaxum. Against them did the Saxons and the Frisians join hands, and fought them twice in one year, like men. And God had pity on the Christians, and, by His aid, in both these fights, theirs was the victory.

§ 73. [70] And in the same year [884] Charles, King of the Germans [*Almannorum*], took unto him, by free assent of all men, the realm of the West Franks, yea, and all the realms between the Tyrrhenian[1] sea and the inlet [*sinus*] which lieth between the Old Saxons and the Gauls,[2] save only the realm of Armorica. And this Charles was the son of King Louis [the German], and this Louis was the brother of Charles, King of the Franks, the father, to wit, of Judith aforesaid. And these two brethren were sons of Louis, and Louis was the son of Charles the Great, the Old, the Wise, and he was the son of Pepin.

§ 74. [71] In the same year went Pope Marinus, of blessed memory, the way of all flesh. He it was who, for the love and at the prayer of Alfred, freed the School of the Saxons[3] tarrying in Rome from all tribute and custom [*talento telonio*]; yea, and moreover sent him therewith many a gift. And amongst these he gave him no small bit of the most holy and worshipful Cross, whereon our Lord Jesus Christ hung for the salvation of all men.

[72] In the same year also the Heathen host which dwelt in East Anglia shamefully brake the peace which they had made with King Alfred.

§ 75. [73] Now then, to return to the point wherefrom I have digressed (lest by so long sea-faring I be forced to forgo altogether the haven where I would be), I will strive [*procurabo*], by the grace of God, shortly and in few words (lest by prolixity in telling my news in full I disgust and offend), to get in a very little (such as has come to my knowledge), about the life, and the ways, and

1 *I.e.* the Western Mediterranean (a name probably derived from this), so-called because it washes the Tyrrhenian, *i.e.* Tuscan, coasts.

2 Asser probably means here the country known as Gaul (or The Gauls) which was bounded by the Rhine.

3 See p. 83.

the right conversation of Alfred, my lord, King of the Anglo-Saxons, and (to no small extent) his deeds also, after he wedded the worshipful bride, of noble Mercian kin, already spoken of.

§ 76 [74] In Mercia, then, even while the marriage rite was being done solemnly and with all honour, amid countless folk of either sex, after long feasting both by day and night—even then was he seized, all at once, before all the throng, with a sudden pain, beyond all telling, and beyond all leech-craft. For it was a thing past the skill of all who were on the spot, and eke of all who have seen it from that day even to this. And this, alas, is the worst of all, that for such a length of time—from his 20th year to his 40th and more—it should have gone on without a break, all these years. Whence came such woe and pain? Many there were who fancied that this thing was brought about by the evil influence of the adoring gaze [*favore et fascinatione*] of the throng round about him; others that it was by the malice of the devil, who ever grudgeth at the good; others, by some unwonted kind of fever. Others hold it a *ficus*;[1] for this grievous kind of disease he had from infancy.

§ 77. But therefrom God had already granted him relief, on a certain day, when he had come into Cornwall to hunt, and turned him aside to pray in a church there, wherein St. Gueriir resteth,[2] and where now St. Neot also is at peace [*pausat*]. For ever would he haunt holy places even from childhood, for prayer and almsdoing. Long lay he prostrate in silent supplication, beseeching the Lord's pity,—that Almighty God, of His infinite mercy, would change the agonies of the distressing infirmity upon him for some other lighter affliction; yet on this condition, that this affliction should not be outwardly apparent in his person, lest he should be scorned and useless. For he dreaded leprosy, or blindness, or any such trouble, which, so soon as it cometh, maketh men scorned and useless. But, when his prayer was done, he took up his journey again; and, but a little after, felt that, even as he had besought in his prayer, he was healed of that plague, by God's grace, so that it was wholly done away.

1 =piles or hæmerhoids.

2 St. Neot's, near Liskeard. Nothing is known of St. Gueriir, whose name is said by Camden to mean 'healer.' The body of St. Neot was translated to his church in Hunts in the 10th century.

§ 78. Yet that plague also had he won from God, by devout prayer and frequent supplication, in the first flower of his youth; pious and prayerful that he was. For (to speak of his good-will and devotion toward God, in few words, though out of due course), when he was in the first flower of his youth, ere yet he had a wife of his own, he was fain to stablish his heart in God's commandments, yet saw he that he could not abstain from fleshly lusts. Then, fearing to incur God's displeasure [*offensam*], if he were to do aught against His Will, often and often would he rise at cock-crow, and very early in the morning, unbeknown to all, sought he the churches and the relics of the saints for to pray. And there long and humbly prayed he that Almighty God, of His mercy, would turn him wholly to Himself, and stablish and strengthen his mind in the love of His service by some infirmity, such as he might bear, yet not such as would make him unfit and useless for his worldly duties.

§ 79. And, seeing that he did this full often, and with whole-hearted devotion, after some little time God granted him the aforesaid *ficus* trouble, wherewith he was long and sore vexed for many years, insomuch that he despaired even of life, until, at his prayer, it was wholly taken away from him. But alas, when that was taken away, another, yet more grievous, seized him, as we have said, at his wedding, and, from his 20th year even unto his 45th, hath vexed him unceasingly, day and night. And if ever, by God's mercy, that infirmity was done away for a single day or night, or even for the space of one hour, yet the fear and dread of that horrible pain never left him, and made him, in his own thought, all but useless for every duty, either to God or man.

§ 80. [75] Thus were there born unto him sons and daughters by his wife aforefaid, to wit, Ethelfled, the eldest, next Edward, then Elgiva [*Aethelgeofu*], afterwards Elfthryth, and finally Ethelward, besides those who were snatched away by all too early a death in infancy, amongst whose number was Edmund. Ethelfled, when she came of age to wed, was united in marriage-bond to Edred, Alderman of the Mercians. Elgiva, in turn, took upon her the service of God, espoused and consecrated to God in the vow of virginity, in the rule of the monastic life. Ethelward, the youngest of all, was handed over, by the counsel of God, and the admirable prudence of the King, to the literary discipline of school, under the

diligent care of masters, along with nearly all the high-born infants of the land, and many, even, not high-born. In this school the books of either tongue, Latin, to wit, and Saxon, were read full diligently. They had time, moreover, for writing. So that, ere yet they had strength for manly [*humanis*] craft, wood-craft, to wit, and such like exercises, such as become the high-born, they proved studious and well-skilled in Liberal Arts. Edward and Elfthryth were ever brought up in the royal court, with all diligence both of tutors and governesses. Yea, they abide even until now, dearly beloved of all, in all lowliness, courtesy, and gentleness toward all, both inland folk and outland, and in whole-hearted obedience to their father. Nor are they suffered slothfully and heedlessly to lack the discipline of a liberal education, amid such other pursuits as become the highborn in this life. For they have learnt the psalms, and Saxon books, and Saxon songs above all, and are for ever reading.

§ 81. [**76**] Yet, all the while, the King, amid his wars, and the constant hindrances of his worldly duties, yea, and the attacks of the Heathen, and his own daily attacks of illness, never slacked nor stayed in his tendance on the helm of the kingdom, and in his practice of all wood-craft; nor yet in his teaching of all his goldsmiths, and his craftsmen, and his falconers, and his huntsmen; nor in his construction of buildings, stately and costly beyond all the elder wont, by new plans of his own; nor in his recitation of Saxon books; nor, most of all, in himself learning by heart Saxon songs, with all diligence and to the utmost of his power, and bidding others do the like.

§ 82. Nor yet slacked he ever in attendance at Divine Service. Daily, to wit, heard he Mass, and certain psalms and prayers, and the Day Hours and the Night Hours.[1] And by night too, as we have said, was he wont to haunt the churches, unbeknown to all his folk, for prayer.

§ 83. Great too was his diligence, and great his bounty, in his almsdeeds which he did, both toward them of his own land and toward incomers from all nations. Kind of speech, above all, was he, beyond compare, and free of wit toward all men. And with all his mind did he throw himself into the seeking out of things unknown.

[1] The private recitation of the Breviary Offices takes at least two hours daily.

§ 84. And of their own free will did many Franks, Frisians, Gauls, Heathens [Danes], Britons, Scots, and Armoricans, bow them to his sway, high-born alike and low-born; and all of them, in his own worthy wise, did he rule, and love, and honour, even as his own folk, and enriched them with place [*potestate*] and profit.

§ 85. Unto Divine Scripture was he ever ready and careful to hearken, and that his own home-born folk should read it him; yet would he join in prayer with outlanders no less, if need arose thereof.

§ 86. His Bishops, moreover, and churchmen of every order, and his Thanes, and his Lords, and his Counsellors [*ministeriales*], also, and all his Household [*familiares*] loved he with wondrous love. And their sons, too, who were brought up in the Royal Household, loved he even as his own, and slacked not by day nor yet by night, in himself setting them in every good way, and imbuing them with culture and the like.

§ 87. Yet (as if in all this he found no comfort) would he, day and night, sadly bewail him, to the Lord, and to all near and dear unto him, with many a sigh and moan (as though he felt no grief either of body or soul save this only), that Almighty God had made him to lack Divine Wisdom and Culture. And herein was he even as the pious Solomon, richest and wisest of all Hebrew kings, who made light of earthly wealth and glory, and asked wisdom from God first. And thus, moreover, found he both—wisdom, to wit, and earthly glory; even as it is written, 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be given [*præstabuntur*][1] unto you.'

§ 88. But God, Who ever beholdeth the inmost heart, by Whose holy inspiration we think those things that be good, by Whose bountiful guiding are performed the same; Who doth put into our minds good desires, never save for this, that He may bring the same to good effect, by His abundant mercy; He stirred up the heart of Alfred, by no outward means, but by His own inward working; even as it is written: '*I will hearken what the Lord God will say within me*' (Psalm lxxxiv.).

§ 89. Fellow-workers, also, of his good purpose, who might help him in the wisdom he longed for, the attaining of his heart's desire,

[1] This is the Old Italic version of St. Matt. vi; (apparently suggested by the sound of the Greek προστεθήσεται). The Vulgata has *adjicientur*.

would he get him whensoever he could. And thus, like as the cunning bee riseth early in the summer morning from the cells of the hive, and cleaveth swiftly the pathless air, and settleth on many a divers plant—moss, or fruit, or flowret—and proveth that which pleaseth her most, and beareth it back home, with all foresight, so sought he from abroad that which he had not at home, that is, in his own realm.

§ 90. [77] And then did God shut not His ears to his cry (for righteous was it, and from a good will), but gave him comfort, and sent unto him, for the arising of light in his darkness, one Werfrith, Bishop of the church of Worcester, a man well taught in the Divine Scripture. And he, at the King's bidding, was the first to turn the books of the Dialogues of Pope Gregory, and of Peter his disciple, from Latin into Saxon, giving sense for sense most clearly and elegantly. Then was there Plegmund, of Mercian kin, Archbishop of Canterbury, a venerable man and a wise, and Athelstan, and Werwulf, priests and chaplains of Mercian kin, and of learning. These four had Alfred called unto him out of Mercia, and raised unto great honour and place in Wessex, beside that which Archbishop Plegmund and Bishop Werfrith had in Mercia.

§ 91. And by all their learning and wisdom, the King's longing grew ever the greater, and slacked not. For day and night, whensoever he had aught of leisure, were books read before him by such as these; nor would he ever suffer himself to be without some one of them. And thus gained he knowledge of almost every book in the world, although of himself as yet he understood nothing about books, for he had not yet begun to read anything.

§ 92. [78] Yet was not all this enough to sate the King's avarice—a praiseworthy avarice. Therefore bade he messengers to get him masters oversea, in Gaul. And thence he called unto him Grimbald, a priest and a monk, a worthy man, and choice singer, and every-way skilled in Church teaching and in Holy Scripture; and John too, also a priest and a monk, one of keen wit, skilled in all rules of literature, and a craftsman in many another art. By their teaching was the King's mind greatly enlarged, and with high place did he enrich and honour them both.

§ 93. [79] And in those days did the King call me also unto him, and into Saxony I came, from the uttermost west of Britain. So set I my face to go unto him, through many a long mile, and

came even unto the land of the Saxons who dwell to the Right [South], which in Saxon is called Sussex, under the guidance of certain of that kin who were with me. And there, in a town-royal that is called Dean,[1] first did I see him.

§ 94. Full kindly was his greeting; and, amid all our talk [*famina*], would he ever press me to devote myself to his service, and to leave for him all that I had in the land north and west of Severn.[2] He promised me all back, and more also (which indeed he fulfilled). Then answered I that I could take upon me such a pledge as this after no rash and heedless sort. For it seemed unfair that I should leave that holy spot wherein I was bred, and taught, and tonsured [*coronatus*], and finally ordained,[3] for any honour or place on earth, save it were by stress of need. Whereto he said, 'Well, if this is too much for thee, grant me at least the half of thy service, so as to be six months of the year with me, and as much in Britain [Wales].' To this I answered, that I could not promise even thus much, in careless courtesy [*suaviter*], without advice of my friends. However, when I saw that he really wanted my service (though I could not think why), I promised that I would come back to him that day six months (if I were alive) and bring him such answer as might be best for me and mine, and satisfactory to himself. And as he took this answer well, I pledged me to return at the appointed time, and, three days later, rode off and made my way back to my own land.

§ 95. But, when departed from him, I was seized, in the city of Wintonia,[4] by a grievous fever, which, for a twelve-month and a week, vexed me day and night, insomuch that I despaired even of life. And, when I came not unto him at the set time, according to promise, he sent me a note [*indiculum*] to hasten my journey, and asking wherefore I stayed it. But, as I could not ride unto him, I sent back another note, to show the cause of my stay, and answer that, if I might be recovered of that sickness, I was ready to carry out my promise. Then, when the sickness left me, by the counsel and licence of all our folk, for the good of that holy place and of all that dwell therein, I pledged my service

1 Probably East or West Dean, near Chichester.

2 *I.e.* South Wales, the Bristol Channel being the Severn Sea.

3 *I.e.* made priest. The tonsure was given at his profession as a monk.

4 Probably Caer Gwent in Monmouthshire. Winchester was also called Caer Gwent.

to the King, even as I had promised, on these terms, that for six months a year I should abide with him (six months on end, if I might, or three months in Britain and three again in Saxony); and that, on this principle [*rudimentum*], the interests of St. David might every way be furthered, to the best of my power.

§ 96. For our folk hoped that, if I came in this wise to the knowledge and friendship of the King, they might have the less hurt and vexation at the hands of King Hemid[1] who oft-times harried the abbey and diocese [*parochiam*] of St. David's.

[80] For at that time, and long before, all the realms of South Wales [*dexteralis Britanniæ*] belonged, as they do still, to King Alfred. Hemid, in fact, with all the folk of Demetia [South Wales], had put themselves under the King's sway, for the violence of the six sons of Rodri.[2] Howel also, the son of Rhys, King of Gleguising,[3] and Brochmail and Fernail, sons of Maurice, King of Gwent,[4] of their own will sought unto the King, that he would be their Lord and Protector—driven thereto by the tyrannical violence of Ethelred, Lord of the Mercians.[5] Helised, too, the King of Brecon, through force of these same sons of Rodri, of himself besought the King's suzerainty. Yea, and Anaraut, the son of Rodri, with his brethren, left, in the end, the friendship of the Northumbrians[6] (from which they never got good but harm), and earnestly sought the friendship of the King, and came in to him. By the King he was received with honour, and taken as his godson at the Bishop's hand in Confirmation, and enriched with many a gift. And he, on his part, submitted him to the Lordship of the King, on this troth, that in all things he would obey the Royal will, even as Ethelred and the Mercians.[7]

[81] Neither was it for nought that all these gained the King's friendship. For they who were fain of more power and land found the same; they who loved money, money; they who would have friendship, friendship; they who would have both, both. For all had the King's love and ward and protection on every side—wheresoever the King and his folk could protect themselves.

1 Hemid, King of South Wales, died 892 (Petrie, 'Annales Cambriæ,' p. 836).
2 King of North Wales, died 877 (*Ibid*).
3 Districts of Monmouthshire. 4 *Ibid*. 5 Alfred's son-in-law.
6 *I.e.* the Danes, who now held Northumbria.
7 Ethelred was merely an Alderman. See p. 42.

§ 97. When, therefore, I came unto him, in the town-royal called Leonaford,[1] I was received by him with all worship. And in that place I abode with him at court for 8 months, wherein I read unto him whatsoever books he would, such as we had at hand. For this is his own most special wont, despite of every hindrance, mental or bodily, either to read books to himself or to listen to others reading, day and night. And though I often besought his leave to go home, yet could I no way obtain it. And when I had at last made up my mind absolutely to demand leave, he called me to him, at twilight on Christmas Eve, and handed me two documents, wherein was an accurate inventory of all things in two monasteries, which in Saxon are called Amesbury and Banwell. And that same day he made over to me those two monasteries, with everything in them, also a pall of silk, very precious, and incense as much as a strong man might carry, adding these words: 'This small gift do I make you; not that I mean it to be the last, nor the best in store for you.' (And he *did* afterwards unexpectedly give me Exeter,[2] with all the diocese thereof in Saxony and in Cornwall; besides daily gifts beyond count, of every kind of earthly wealth, which it were long to reckon up here, and tedious to my readers. But let none think that I here make mention of these gifts for any vain glory, or lust of greater honour. For I call God to witness that I do it for no such end; but that I may make it clear to them that know him not how profuse is his liberality.) Then at once gave he me leave to ride to those two monasteries, so well furnished with all good things, and thence to return home.

§ 98. [82] In the year of our Lord's Incarnation 886, the 35th [38th] of Alfred's age, the oft-mentioned host again fled the realm, and came into the land of the West Franks. Into the river called Seine did they steer their ships, and far up against the stream; and came to the city of Paris and there wintered and wrought them a stronghold, on a bend in the river, hard by the bridge, so that they stayed the towns-folk from crossing thereby. For that city lieth in the midst of the river, on a little island. For a whole year

1 Linford, in Berkshire.

2 Exeter was at this date in the huge diocese of Sherborne, which included Somerset, Dorset, Devon, and Cornwall, and of which Asser was Bishop. Devon and Cornwall where formed (c. 26) into a separate see of Credition, which was not transferred to Exeter till 1050. But Exeter was always the most important town in the district.

on end besieged they that city; but, by the mercy and grace of God, and the manful defence of the townsmen, never could they break in.

§ 99. [883] In the same year Alfred, King of the Anglo-Saxons, worshipfully restored the city of London, after the burning of the place and the massacre of the folk thereof, and made men to dwell therein, and made it over the wardship of Ethelred, Alderman of Mercia. And to this King did all, both Angles and Saxons, who before were scattered far and wide or were[1] in bondage to the Heathen, freely come in and bowed them to his sway.

§ 100. [2][In the same year there arose at Oxford a grievous and shameful feud between Grimbald and those men of great learning, whom he had brought thither with him, and the old schoolmen whom he found there, who, at his coming, utterly refused to embrace the rules, customs, and methods of lecturing, which this same Grimbald instituted. For three years there had been dissension between them, nothing much; but yet the privy hate, which afterwards burst forth in most atrocious wise, was clear as daylight. And to appease it, did King Alfred the Conqueror, whom a message of complaint from Grimbald had let know of this feud, himself come to Oxford, that he might put an end to this controversy. And himself took he infinite trouble in hearing the case and the complaints brought on either side.

§ 101. The head and front of the contention lay in this. The old schoolmen contended that, before Grimbald came to Oxford, letters had flourished there more or less, even though the scholars were, as at that time, fewer than of old, many having been driven out by the savage and cruel Heathen. Moreover they proved and showed, and that by undisputed witness of the ancient Annals, that the ordinances and institutions of the place had been sanctioned by many a pious and learned man (such as St. Gildas, Melkin, Nennius, Kentigern, and others), who all passed lettered lives there, and bare rule therein in all peace and happiness and concord. Also that St. Germanus had come to Oxford, and stayed there half a year, when he went through Britain to preach against the Pelagian heresy, and was wonderfully pleased with the aforesaid ordinances and institutions.

[1] The A.S. Chronicle shows that a *not* has been left out here.

[2] All this is a fraudulent insertion. See p. 51.

§ 102. The King, with unheard-of lowliness, heard out both sides with the utmost care, giving them again and again salutary advice and exhortation to keep the peace and agree together. Then departed he, thinking that both sides would submit them to his counsel and embrace his precepts. Grimbald, however, took it badly, and went off at once to the Abbey newly founded by Alfred at Winchester, and finally took the trouble to transfer to Winchester the tomb, wherein he proposed that his bones should be laid, after his course here was run, and which had been made under the chancel of St. Peter's at Oxford. For this church, in sooth, Grimbald himself had built from the very foundation, of stone polished with the utmost care.]

§ 103. [84] In the year of our Lord's Incarnation 887, the 36th [39th] of the age of King Alfred, the oft-named Heathen host left the city of Paris untaken, and (inasmuch as no other way was open to them) rowed their fleet through the bridge and up the Seine, till they came to the mouth of the river Marne. There left they the Seine, and turned up the Marne, and rowed up it, with no small toil, till they came to a place called Chezy, which is a town-royal, and there wintered they one whole year. And, the year after, they made their way into the mouth of the river Yonne, and did great hurt to those parts. And there abode they one year.

§ 104. [85] In that same year Charles, King of the Franks, went the way of all flesh. But Arnulf, his nephew, had driven him from the kingdom six weeks ere he died. And, so soon as ever he was dead, forthwith five Kings were set up, and the realm was cut up into five shares. Nevertheless the chief seat of the kingship came to Arnulf, as was meet and right, save only for his unworthy sin against his uncle. Moreover the other four Kings pledged their faith and obedience to Arnulf, as was fitting; for none of those four was heir to the kingdom on the father's side, but Arnulf only. Thus were five Kings set up, so soon as ever Charles was dead; but the Empire abode with Arnulf. Thus, then, was the kingdom divided; Arnulf had the realms east of the Rhine; Rudolf the midmost part of the kingdom; Oda the West; Beorngar and Guy Lombardy, and those parts which are on that side of the mountain. Yet did they not hold these realms, as they were, in peace. For twice they met in stricken field, and oft wasted the realm, each in turn. And either drave the other from the kingdom.

§ 105. [86] In the same year, too, that the host left the city of Paris and came to Chézy, Ethelhelm, the Alderman of Wiltshire, took to Rome the alms of King Alfred and of the Saxons.

§ 106. [87] In this year did our oft-mentioned Alfred, King of the Anglo-Saxons, first begin by Divine inspiration on one and the self-same day both to read[1] and to interpret. But that I may explain this more fully I will relate the cause of this late beginning.

[88] It came to pass on a certain day we were both sitting in the King's chamber, conversing on all kinds of subjects, as was our wont. And it chanced that I recited to him a quotation [*testimonium*] from a certain book. He heard it attentively, with both his ears, and pondered it deeply in his heart. Then suddenly showing me a book which he carried in his bosom, wherein were written the Daily Courses and Psalms and Prayers which he had read from his youth up, he bade me write therein that same quotation. Hearing this and perceiving his willing wit and his devout eagerness for Divine Wisdom, then gave I, though silently, boundless thanks to Almighty God, raising my hands towards Heaven, that He had implanted in my King's heart such devotion to Wisdom.

§ 107. But I could not find any empty space in the book wherein to write the quotation, for it was already quite full of many a matter. Wherefore I made some small tarrying, chiefly thereby to stir up the bright intelligence of the King. And when he urged me to make haste and write it speedily, I said unto him, 'Wilt thou that I should write it on a separate leaf? For it is not certain but that we may yet find another such extract, or even more, that may please you. And should that so be we shall be glad to have kept them separate.' 'Try that plan,' he replied. Then gladly did I haste to make ready a sheet [*quaternio*], at the beginning whereof I wrote the extract even as he bade. And that self-same day I wrote also on that sheet no less than three more quotations at his bidding, even as I had foretold. And every day after, as we talked, did we find other like pleasing passages, till the sheet became quite full. And rightly too. For it is written: '*The just buildeth on a small foundation, and, little by little, passeth on to more.*'

§ 108. Even as a busy bee rangeth far and wide searching

[1] *I.e.* as a scholar.

through the wilds [*gronnios*], even so did he ever eagerly get together many a flowret of the Divine Scriptures, with which he filled to overflowing the cells of his heart.

[89] For so soon as that first testimony was written down, he set himself on the spot to read and interpret it in the Saxon tongue, and then to begin many others.

§ 109. And as we are taught by the happy thief who acknowledged Jesus Christ, his Lord and ours, even as He hung beside him on that adorable gibbet the holy Cross (for in lowly prayer he bent on Him only his bodily eyes, seeing that otherwise he might not worship, so transfixed with nails was he, and humbly cried 'Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom'), and first began on the very gallows [*gabulo*][1] to learn the rudiments of the Christian Faith; so, in like manner (though in the very different position of a royal throne), did Alfred, by Divine inspiration, first take upon him to begin the learning of Holy Scripture on the Feast of St. Martin.

§ 110. And these flowrets, gathered from all fields, learnt he from many a master and set them in one book, as he might, one with another, by no regular plan, till it grew by degrees to the size of a Psalter. And this volume he called his Encheiridion, or Manual, or Handbook, because he kept it at hand both night and day, and drew therefrom, as he would say, no small comfort.

§ 111. [90] But (even as it is written by a certain sage:

Watchful their minds, who rule with pious care')[2]

I see that I must be on my guard, inasmuch as I have just made a comparison between that happy thief and my King. For everyone hateth a gibbet, and everywhere it is loathed. But what can a man do, if he may not avoid the same, nor yet flee, nor yet by any device better his case if he fleeth not? Needs must he, will he, nill he [*velit, nolit*], with woe and sadness endure the pain.

§ 112. [91] Even so was the King pierced by the nails of many a sorrow, King though he was. For from 20 years of age to 45 (which he is now [893]) he has been incessantly worn down by the grievous attacks of an unknown malady; so that he has never known one quiet hour, wherein he is not either bearing the pang, or depressed almost to despair by the dread thereof. Moreover the

[1] From the Celtic *gabul* = fork; whence our *gable*.

[2] *Invigilant animi quibus est pin cura regendi.* (The 'sage' is unknown.)

constant attacks of outlanders, which he had to meet by land and sea, without rest or stay, troubled him with good cause.

§ 113. And what shall I say more? For the time would fail me to tell how oft he went forth against the Heathen to war; how incessant were his cares of kingship; how day by day had he embassies from the folk that dwell by the Tyrrhenian Sea, and unto the uttermost parts of Iberia (yea, I have seen and read letters directed unto him by Abel, Patriarch of Jerusalem, and gifts withal); of his restoring of towns and cities, yea, and building such where none were before; of the palaces of gold and silver, beyond compare, set up under his teaching; of the halls and chambers, both of wood and stone, right royally and wondrously wrought, by his bidding; of the towns-royal moved, stone by stone, from their ancient sites, and planted in fitter spots at his kingly command.

§ 114. And, besides that pain, great trouble and vexation had he with his own folk, who, of their own will, were ready to take little or no pains for the common need of the realm. Yet, all alone, stood he, by God's help, at the helm of the kingdom; even as a master helmsman setteth him (though nearly all his seamen be weary), to bring his ship, with all its rich cargo, safe unto the haven where he would be in his own land. Even so suffered he in himself no fainting nor wavering, though amid the many eddies and tideways [*fluctivagos*] of this present world.

§ 115. For his Bishops, and Aldermen, and all his servants of high degree, whom most he loved, yea, and his Sheriffs [*præpositos*], to whom, after God and the King, the sway of the whole realm seemeth meetest to be entrusted, with the utmost care and wisdom, did he bend and bind to his will and to the common weal, and by gentle teaching, by kind attentions [*adulando*], by exhortation, by command, and, in the last resort, by sharp punishment of the disobedient, and by showing, in every way, his loathing of their low-bred folly and obstinacy.

§ 116. Yet, despite of his kingly exhortations, such was the slothfulness of the folk that his bidding was not carried out, or so late that it came to no good end or use;—(there are strongholds I could name, ordered by him and not begun to this day, or begun too late and not wrought to an end). For either did the enemies' force, land or sea, break in, or (as often happened) they who at first set them against the King's ordinances [*definitionum*] were sore

ashamed, when on the brink of ruin, and repented them in vain. For a vain repentance I call it (and by Scripture warrant), which so many often feel when struck by grievous loss through the many ill-deeds they have perpetrated. For though, through this thing, (out and alas!) they be in misery and sorrow, and moved to tears by the loss of their parents, their wives, their children, their servants, their slaves, their handmaidens, their trade, and all that they had, yet what availeth such futile repentance? For neither can they help their friends that be slain, nor redeem them that be captive from their loathed thraldom, nor even, oftentimes, help themselves, though they be escaped, seeing they have nought whereby to keep life in them. Then, all too late, do that fair-spoken folk [*eulogii*] repent indeed, and grieve for their careless contempt of the King's writ, and with one voice praise the King's wisdom, and vow to fulfil with all their strength what erst they refused; with regard to working strongholds, that is, and other things that be for the common weal of the realm.

§ 117. [92] Here too I hold it profitable not to pass over the matter of his vow, and the proposition which he so well thought out; and of which neither in prosperity nor adversity did he ever lose hold. For, amongst the other good deeds which were his daily and nightly study, he, thinking as was his wont, of the needs of his soul, bade two abbeys be builded. The one was for monks, in the place called Athelney, which is girt by great and wide fens [*gronnia*], swampy and impassable to a degree. Nor can any reach it by any means whatsoever, save by canoes [*cauticis*], or by one single bridge.[1] This bridge was built between two towers with toilsome skill; and at the west end thereof was set, by the King's command, yet another tower, strong beyond the rest, and of beautiful workmanship. And in this Abbey he gathered monks of divers race from far and wide, and set them therein.

§ 118. [93] For, in the first place, he had not of his own kin one high-born or free man (save infants, who, by reason of their tender age, could not yet either choose the good or refuse the evil) ready, of his own free will, to take upon him the monastic life. For in sooth the desire for monastic life had, by the space of many a year, both in that race and in many others, come utterly to an end.

[1] Only some 50 yards of swamp and watercourse separate Athelney from the mainland to the West.

And, although there yet remain many monasteries built in that land, yet none commonly holdeth that Rule of life. Why, I know not. It may be through the attacks of the aliens, who so oft break in as foemen by land and sea; or, perchance, by the over-abundant riches of the English, which I much rather hold to be the cause of their contempt for the monastic life.

§ 119. [94] Therefore did Alfred set him to get together in that Abbey monks of divers race; first John, who was of Old Saxon kin, and whom he made Abbot, next certain priests and deacons from over-sea. And, seeing he had not yet the number he wanted, he got furthermore several infants, also of Gallic race, whom he bade to be bred up in the Abbey, and thereafter raised to the monastic habit. And in that Abbey, too, did I see one monk even of Heathen [Danish] kin, who had been brought up in the Abbey: nor was he the last of such.

§ 120. [95] Moreover a foul deed once upon a time wrought in that Abbey would I not give over to the noiseless oblivion of mute silence; though an unworthy deed it was. For throughout all scripture the shameful doings of the wicked are interspersed amid the worshipful actions of the just, even as tares and bindweed amid the wheat-crops. And this, to the end that the good may be praised, followed, and valued, and that their imitators also may be held worthy of all honour; while the bad are blamed, and cursed, and altogether held aloof from, and *their* imitators branded with the common hate and contempt, and the vengeance of all men.

§ 121. [96] For, once upon a time, by giving place to the devil, a certain priest and a certain deacon amongst these monks, Frenchmen by kin, were roused to hidden envy against this John, their Abbot. And so bitter grew they (all too secretly), that, even as Judas [*Judaico more*], they plotted against their lord, and betrayed him. For they hired two serving lads [*servulos*], of their own French kin, and treacherously taught them how, at dead of night, when everybody was asleep, in full enjoyment of its delicious rest, they should arm them, and open the church door, and creep in, and shut it behind them, and hide away, and await the coming-in of the Abbot all alone. And when, after his wont, he had entered the church for private prayer, and was on his knees before the holy Altar, they should rush in upon him, and slay him, if they might, upon the spot, and drag his dead body thence, and cast it down

before the door of a certain harlot, as though he had been slain in fornication. All this plot laid they, adding crime to crime; even as it is said, '*And the last error shall be worse than the first.*'

§ 122. But by God's mercy, which ever helpeth the guiltless, the wicked counsel of these wicked men was mostly brought to nought, so that all came not to pass as they had proposed.

[97] So this bad lesson was taught with all clearness by these bad teachers to their bad scholars, and the set night came and closed in, and all seemed safe, and those two thievlings [*latrunculos*] shut they up in the church to await the coming of the Abbot.

§ 123. And when, in the middle of the night, John, after his wont, had entered the church to pray in secret, no man wotting thereof, and was on his knees bowed down before the Altar, then, all at once, out rushed upon him those two thievlings, with drawn swords, and cruelly struck and wounded him. But he, after his wont, was ever of ready wit, and, as I have been told, not without warcraft, had not a better discipline been his. At once then, even as he heard the noise of those thieves, before he saw them, rose he readily against them, ere yet he was wounded, and strove against them all he might, shouting aloud, and crying that they were fiends, not men. For indeed he knew no otherwise, nor thought he that men would have dared this deed.

§ 124. His own folk, aroused by the fray, and hearing the cry, 'Fiends! Fiends!' were frightened to death, and knew not what to do. Yet ran they from all sides to the church door, yea, even those twain who, like Judas, had betrayed their Lord. But, before they got thither, the thievlings had rushed off headlong, leaving the Abbot half dead, and sought hiding in the neighbouring fen.

§ 125. And the monks picked up their Superior half dead, and bare him home with lamentation and mourning, and the traitors wept as loudly as the innocent. But God's mercy suffered not so foul a deed to go unpunished. The thievlings, who had done it, were caught, and bound, they and their inciters to the villainy, one and all, and died a death of shame, in torments many a one. So, having told this tale, let us go back to our task.

§ 126. [98] Our King aforesaid bade to build yet another Abbey, by the east gate of Shaftesbury [*Sceftresburg*], as an abode for nuns *sanctimoniales*], and made his own daughter Elgiva [*Æthelgeofu*],

a virgin vowed to God, Abbess there. And along with her dwelleth in that same Abbey many another high-born nun, serving God in the monastic life. And these two Abbeys endowed he richly with lands and wealth of all kind.

§ 127. [99] When all this was thus settled, as was his wont, he took thought with himself what more he could add which might make yet further for pious meditation. Fruitful were his beginnings, profitable his conceptions, more profitable his continuance in well doing. For long ago had he heard the promise of the Lord, even as it is written in the Law, that He would return His tithe a thousandfold, and that the promise of the Lord is faithful, and that He *would* return His tithe a thousandfold. Stirred by this, and willing to overpass the wont of his fore-fathers, our pious thinker devoutly and faithfully vowed with his whole heart that he would give unto God the half of his service—the half of his time, to wit, both night and day, yea, and the half of all the wealth that came in to him year by year with right and justice. And, so far as human discernment can perceive did he study both to keep this vow with all his mind, and with all his wisdom to fulfil the same.

§ 128. But, after his wont, he was careful not to offend against that warning which is written elsewhere in Holy Scripture: '*Though thou offerest aright, yet sinnest thou, if so be thou dividest not aright.*'[1] Therefore took he thought how he might divide aright his free-will offering and vow unto the Lord. And, as saith Solomon, '*In the Hand of the Lord is the King's heart*'[2]—that is his counsel—even so by Divine inspiration took he counsel with himself, whence he bade his officers divide his annual income always into two equal shares, to begin with.

[100] When this was done he assigned the first share to secular affairs; and bade it be divided again into three shares.

§ 129. The first of these he gave yearly to his soldiers, and also to his high-born thanes, who by turns abode in the royal court, serving in many an office. (For the Royal Household [*familiaritas*] was commonly ever worked by three relays, and the courtiers [*sortellites*] of our King were divided into three bands [*cohortes*], whereof the one abode day and night in the Royal Court for one month. And when the month was ended, another band came on

1 This is the Old Italic version (word for word from the LXX) of Gen. iv. 7).

2 Proverbs xxi. 1.

duty, and the first went home and there abode two months, seeing each to his own private affairs. So also the second band, when its month was up, returned home, and there abode two months; and the third came on duty. And it too served for one month, and when the first came on again, returned home, and there abode two months. By this roster the service of the Royal Court is ever arranged even unto the present day.)

[101]. Thus then assigned he the first of the three shares of this half of his wealth, to each according to his several dignity and his several ministry.

§ 130. But the second share gave he to the craftsmen, whom he had got together from many a race, and in almost countless numbers, well skilled in every kind of building known on earth. And the third share gave he to the strangers of every race who flocked unto him from far and near, and asked of him money. Nay, even though they asked not, yet gave he to each according to his several worthiness, full gladly, and with a wondrously open hand, beyond all praise: even as it is written: '*God loveth a cheerful giver*' [2 Cor. ix. 7].

§ 131. [102] But the second half of all the wealth which yearly came in to him, from whatever source, and was paid into his privy purse, he vowed, as we have just now said, freely and fully to God. And he bade his officers heedfully to part the same into four shares, in such wise, that the first of these shares should be paid over to the poor of every race who came unto him. And this with the utmost carefulness, for he minded him in this matter to take heed, so far as man's discretion might serve, to the saying of St. Gregory,[1] which, in treating rightwise almsgiving, ran thus: '*Give not little to whom you should give much, nor much to whom little, nor nought to whom ought, nor ought to whom nought.*'

§ 132. And the second part he gave to the two Abbeys of his own foundation (whereof we have lately spoken at greater length), and to the servants of God therein. And the third to the School, wherein he had so carefully gathered many of the high-born of his own race. And the fourth to the Abbeys round about, in all Wessex and Mercia. And in some years, too, he gave, as he might, or proposed to give later (saving his own life and issue), by turn to the churches in Wales and Cornwall, in Gaul, Britanny,

1 'De Cura Pastorali,' III., xxi.

Northumbria, and even, now and then, in Ireland, and to the servants of God who dwelt therein.

§ 133. [103] When our King had thus set all this in order, he minded him of that verse of Holy Scripture which saith: '*He who would give alms must first give himself.*' Then thought he out with all prudence what of the service of his own body and mind he might give unto God. For of this he proposed to give unto God no less than of his outward wealth. Yea, moreover he vowed that the half of the service of his mind and body, so far as his weakness and power and sufficiency would permit, would he, by day and night alike, of his own free will and with all his might, render unto God.

§ 134. But, inasmuch as by night he could not rightly tell the hours, because of the darkness, and by day because of the constant showers and clouds, he set himself to think out how, trusting in God's mercy, he might, by some fixed rule and without hesitation, keep this vow changelessly, even unto death.

[104] And, when he had thought this over for a while, he found out at length a useful device, and of good wit. Then bade he his chaplain[1] bring him wax enough, and weigh it out in the balance against pennies. And when so much wax had been measured out as weighed 72 pennies, he bade his chaplains make thereof six candles of equal weight, and that each candle should have 12 inches [*uncias pollicis*] marked thereon. So, when this device had been hit upon, those six candles were lighted, and burnt without fail day and night throughout the 24 hours before the holy relics of many a Saint of God, which were ever with him whithersoever he went.

§ 135. Sometimes, however, these candles would not last throughout a whole day and night, even unto the same hour at which they had been lighted the evening before;—and this through the draughts of wind which, day and night, ceaselessly blew in through the doors and windows of the churches, and through the many chinks in the stonework and the woodwork and the partitions, yea, and the holes in tents, and caused the candles to

1 The 'chaplains' of this date were the officials over the finances of the Royal Worship. The word 'chapel' was already in use on the Continent (as at Aix-la-Chapelle) for a Royal oratory. Originally it was the building at St. Denis (Sainte Chapelle) where the cope [*cappa*] of St. Martin was kept for the Royal veneration.

burn away over quickly, before completing their hour. Therefore thought he out how he might hinder this draught, and found a plan, like a wise and cunning craftsman, and bade make of wood and horn a full fair lantern. For cowhorn is white, and, when planed down to a thin sheet, as transparent as glass. And when this wonderful lantern of wood and horn was completed, a candle set therein gave as much light inside as though it were outside, and was let and hindered by never a draught, for he had bade a horn door [*valvam*] to be made to the mouth of the lantern. By this device, then, the six candles, one after the other, burnt without stay for the 24 hours, neither more nor less. And when they went out others were lighted.[1]

§ 136. [105] Now when all this was wholly set in order, he was fain to keep the half of his service for God, according to his vow; —nay, even more, so far as his power and sufficiency (to say nothing of his infirmity) would permit. At great length moreover did he look into the truth of the judgments he gave; and this chiefly through his care for the poor, to whom, amid the other duties of this life, he ever took special heed. For in all the whole realm, save him alone, the poor had few or none to champion them. For all the high and mighty of the land gave thought to the things of this world rather than the things of God. Yea, more greedy was each of his own worldly gain than for the common weal.

§ 137. [106] Pains, likewise, took he in judgment, for the good of his folk, high-born and low-born alike. For at the courts of the Aldermen and Sheriffs would they oft-times perversely strive together, so that scarce a man, whatsoever the doom of the Aldermen and Sheriffs might be, would allow it to be right. And through stress of this perverse stubbornness, all appealed [*suborabant*] to the King's own judgment, and, on either side, hasted them thereto. Howbeit were any conscious of unright in his cause, he, though bound perforce by law and bond to come, yet came he against his will, for never would he by choice appear before the judgment-seat of such a judge. For well he knew that there no whit of his wrong doing could be pleaded for a moment.[2]

1 See p. 66.

2 Strictly speaking it was not the Aldermen and Sheriffs who judged causes but the Moot-Courts of the Hundred and Shire over which they presided. But their charges were no doubt almost always followed. And strictly speaking there was no Appeal. But the parties could choose an Arbitrator, whose decision was final; and if one of them chose the King the others would practically be forced to do the same.

§ 138. And no wonder; for in deciding a case, as in all things else, our King was a most keen searcher out of truth. For nearly every sentence given throughout the whole realm, in his absence, did he himself revise with all his wit, whether they were righteous or unrighteous. And if he perceived in those sentences ought of injustice, then would he mildly summon the judges before him, either in person or by some accredited friend, and would ask them why they had judged thus wrongfully. Was it through ignorance? Was it through malice? Was it for love or fear of any? Was it for hate of any? Was it through greed of money?

§ 139. And, in the end, if those judges confessed that they had given judgment for any such reason, as that they knew no better, then would he, with good sense and self-control, blame their lack of skill and wisdom, and say, 'Much, truly, do I wonder at this rashness of yours, that ye, who, by God's gift and mine, take upon you the office and rank of the wise, yet neglect to study and work wisdom. I bid you, therefore, either at once to lay down that earthly authority and office which ye hold, or set yourselves to much more earnest study of wise teaching. Such is my behest.'

§ 140. At hearing this would the Aldermen and Sheriffs tremble, as though they had been chastised full sorely, and strove with all their might to turn to the study of Equity. Thus, wondrous to tell, did the Aldermen Sheriffs, and Thanes, unlettered men as they were, almost all, even from their cradles, set to work at letters with a will. For sooner chose they to learn unwonted lessons, hard though they found it, than give up their office and authority.

§ 141. But if any, either from age or from slowness of wit (through lack of use), could make no speed in his liberal studies, then would he bid his son, if he had one, or some other kinsman, or even, if it might no better be, his own man, free or thrall (whom he had long before made a reader), to recite to him Saxon books, day and night, whensoever leisure [*licentia*] might serve. And with many a sigh grieved he from his inmost heart, that he had not in youth set him to these duties. And happy counted he the lads of to-day, who could have the good fortune to be trained in liberal arts. But themselves they thought unlucky, seeing that in their youth they had never been taught, and in age, much as they longed therefor, learn they could not. So now we have set forth

the pains of both old and young in learning letters at our King's bode.

* * * * *

[Here Asser abruptly breaks off. His later paragraphs bear evident internal marks of having been written after Alfred's death, and we do not know what prevented the completion of the biography. The obituary notice which follows is from the Chronicle of St. Neot's.]

* * * * *

In the year of our Lord 900, Alfred the Truth-teller, in war ever the sturdiest of heroes, noblest of the Kings of Wessex, prudent and religious and wise beyond all, in this year, after reigning 29 years and a half over all England (save those parts which were under the Danes), to the grievous woe of his folk, went the way of all flesh on the 7th of the Kalends of November [Oct. 26], in the year of his reign 29 and a half, of his age 51, of the indiction 4. And in the royal city of Winchester was he buried meetly, with all royal honours, in the church of St. Peter the Prince of the Apostles. And there standeth his tomb, wrought of marble porphyry, most precious.

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Parker adds the eulogium of Henry of Huntingdon. See p. 76.

II.

THE ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLE.

OF the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle six early MSS. are still extant, one in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, one in the Bodleian Library, and the remainder among the Cottonian collection in the British Museum They do not all cover the same period of history; some beginning with the invasion of Julius Cæsar, others with the Christian Era, and ending, also, at various dates, from 977 to 1154. Internal evidence shows them to have been written at sundry times (none later than the twelfth century), and in divers parts of England—Wessex, Kent, Mercia, and Northumbria. But all are from a common ninth-century exemplar. The latest original handwriting of any copy ends 1122, the earliest 891. This last is the Cambridge MS., which formerly belonged to the library of Canterbury Abbey. Like all other books in abbey libraries throughout England, it was sold for waste-paper at the Reformation, but rescued by Archbishop Parker, who gave it to his old College.

The standard edition of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is that of Messrs. Petrie and Hardy.

ENTRIES RELATING TO THE LIFE OF ALFRED IN THE ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLE.

851. This year King Athelstan [of Kent] and Ealhere the Alderman cut to pieces a mighty host at Sandwich in Kent, and took nine ships, and put the rest to flight. The Heathen, for the first time, stayed over winter, and that in Thanet. And this same year came there 350 ships into Thames-mouth, and they stormed Canterbury, and eke London, and put to flight Beorhtwulf, King of the Mercians, and his host with him. Then went they south over Thames into Surrey; and there King Ethelwulf and his son Ethelbald, with all the muster of the West Saxons, fought them at Ockley. And there made they the greatest slaughter among the Heathen host that ever was heard tell of, and there won the day.

* * * * *

853. This year . . . King Ethelwulf sent his son Alfred to Rome. Leo was then Pope of Rome, and took him for his own son in Confirmation[1]. . . . And Ethelwulf . . . gave his daughter to Burghred, King of the Mercians.

855. . . . King Ethelwulf gave by writ the tenth part of his land for the glory of God and his own eternal salvation. And the same year he went to Rome, with mickle worship, and there dwelt he a twelvemonth, and then home again. Then did Charles, King of the Franks, give his daughter unto him for wife; and so came he back to his folk, and right glad they were thereof. And about two years after he died, and his body lieth at Winchester.[2] And he reigned eighteen years and a half.

* * * * *

Then came Ethelwulf's two sons to the kingdom. Ethelbald took the realm of the West Saxon, and Ethelbert the Kentish-men, and the East Saxons, and Surrey, and the South Saxons. . . .

And when Pope Leo heard say that he [Ethelwulf] was dead, then hallowed he Alfred to King. . . .

860. This year died King Ethelbald; and lieth at Sherborne. And Ethelbert took on all his brother's kingdom; and in goodly peace did he hold it, and great quietness.

1 See p. 16. 2 See Asser, § 21.

And in his days came there a mighty ship-host to land, and stormed Winchester. And Osric the Alderman, with the men of Hampshire, and Ethelwulf the Alderman, with his Berkshire men, fought that host, and put them to flight, and held the death-stead [*i.e.* won the field]. And Ethelbert reigned five years; and lieth at Sherborne.

861. This year died St. Swithun the Bishop.

865. The Heathen host sat them down in Thanet, and made peace with the men of Kent, and they plighted them pay for that peace. Yet amid the peace and the pay-plight the Host by night stole away, and harried all Kent eastward.

866. This year Ethelred, Ethelbert's brother, came into the West Saxon kingship.

And the same year came there into Angle-kin a mighty Heathen host, and wintered among the East Angles. And there were they horsed. And the East Angles made peace with them.

867. This year went the Host from East Anglia, over Humber-mouth, to the city of York in Northumbria. And there was much strife among that folk betwixt themselves, insomuch that they had cast out their King Osbert, and taken to themselves Ella as their King, and he was of no family. Yet, though late, they set them, this year, to fight the Host. Therefore gathered they a mighty muster, and sought the Host at York, and some of them got within. And endless slaughter was there made on the Northumbrians, some within and some without [the walls]. And the Kings were both slain. And the rest made peace with the Host.

868. This year that same Host went into Mercia to Nottingham, and there wintered. And Burghred, King of the Mercians, and his Witan, besought help of Ethelred, King of the West Saxons, and of Alfred his brother, that they might fight with the Host. Then came they into Mercia, with the full force of Wessex, even unto Nottingham. And there found they the Host within the stronghold, and beset them therein. Yet was there no fighting; and the Mercians made peace with the Host.

869. This year went the Host again unto York, and sat therein one year.

870. This year the Host rode over Mercia into East Anglia, and took winter-rest at Thetford. And the same winter King Edmund fought with them. And the Danes won the day. And the King

they slew, and all the whole land brought they under, and brake down all the Minsters that ever they came to. The names of the two chiefs who slew the King were Ingwair and Ubba. And they came, as at that time, to Medehampstead,[1] and burnt it, and brake it all down, and slew Abbot and monks and all that they found there. And that place, which before was full rich, brought they to nothing.

* * * * *

871. This year came the Host to Reading in Wessex. And some three days after, rode two of their earls forth. Then met them Ethelwulf the Alderman at Englefield, and there fought with them, and won the day. And there was one of them slain; his name was Sidroc.

Some four days more and King Ethelred [*Aethered*], with Alfred his brother, led on a great force to Reading, and fought with the Host. And there was great slaughter made on either hand; and Ethelwulf the Alderman was slain, and the Danish-men held the death-stead. Yet another four days, and King Ethelred and Alfred his brother fought with that whole Host at Ashdown [*Aescesdune*]. And they were in two bands: in the one were Bachseg and Halfdene, the heathen Kings, and in the other the Earls. Then fought King Ethelred with the Kings; and there was King Bagsecg slain. And Alfred his brother fought with the Earls: and there was slain Earls Sidoc the Elder, and Sidoc the Younger, and Osbearn, and Frena, and Harold. And both bands of the Host were put to flight; and many thousands were there slain; and they stood fighting on even unto nightfall.

And, about a fourteen days after, King Ethelred and Alfred his brother fought with the Host at Basing; and there the Danes won the field. And, two months later, King Ethelred and Alfred his brother fought with the Host at Merton. Two bands were there of them; and both did they put to flight; and for the most of the day had the better; and much slaughter was there on either hand. Yet held the Danes the death-stead. And there Bishop Heahmund [of Sherborne] was slain, and many a good man.

And after this fight came a great summer-lead to Reading. And over Easter [Ap. 15] King Ethelred died. He had reigned five years. And his body lieth at Wimborne Minster. And Alfred

[1] *i.e.* Peterborough.

Ethelwulfing [*i.e.* Ethelwulf's son] took to the West Saxon kingship.

And, about one month after, did King Alfred, with but a small band, fight with all the whole Host at Wilton. And for the most of the day put he them to flight: yet the Danes held the death-stead.

And this year were there fought against the Host, in the land from Thames southward, nine stricken fields. Yea, and beside these, Alfred the King's brother, and many an Alderman, and many a King's Thane, ofttimes made, each for himself, raids upon them, which are not counted. And within the year nine Earls were slain, and one King thereto. And that year the West Saxons made peace with the Host.

872. This year the Host went off from Reading to London, and there wintered. And the Mercians made peace with them.

873. This year the Host went into Northumbria, and at Torksey in Lindsey did they winter.

874. This year went the Host from Lindsey to Repton, and there they wintered. And King Burghred drave they over-sea, about 22 years since he came to that kingdom, and they brought under the whole land, and he went to Rome, and there abōde, and lieth in St. Mary's Church, at the English School. And that same year gave they the kingdom of the Mercians to the ward of one Ceolwulf, a King's Thane, and a fool withal. And he sware oaths to them, and gave sureties thereto, that the kingdom should be ready for them on whatsoever day they would have it. Yea, and that he likewise would be ready, himself and all who would follow him, at the behest of the Host.

875. Then went the Host away from Repton. And with some of them went off Halfdene into Northumbria, and wintered by Tyne-side. And the Host brought under that land, and spoiled ofttimes the Picts, and the Strathclyde Britons. And three Kings, Guthrum, and Oscytel, and Anwynd, fared unto Cambridge with a great Host, and sat them down there one year.

And that summer did King Alfred put out to sea with a ship-force, and fought against seven ship-crews. And one of them he took, and the rest he put to flight.

876. This year the Host stole away to Wareham, a West-Saxon stronghold. And thereafter made the King peace with them, and they gave unto him sureties, of the best in the Host and most of

worship; yea, and sware unto him upon the Holy Ring[1] (which never before would they do to any folk), that they would speedily leave his kingdom. Yet, notwithstanding, such of the Host as were horsed stole away from the stronghold by night, even unto Exeter.

And King Halfdene shared out the lands of Northumbria, and thenceforth they abode thereon, ploughing and tilling the same.

This year Rollo and his gang overran Normandy; and he reigned there fifty years.[2]

877. Now came the Host from Wareham unto Exeter. And a fleet came sailing westward, and at sea a great storm overcame them, and there at Swanwich were they wrecked, 120 ships. And King Alfred with his men rode after the horsemen of the Host, even unto Exeter; yet might they not overtake them ere they were within the fastness; and there might they not be come at. Yet gave they unto him sureties, as many as he would, and sware many oaths. And this time they kept the peace well. And afterwards, in Harvest-tide, went that Host into Mercia. And some of the land shared they out among them, and some made they over to Ceolwulf.

878. This year, during midwinter, after Twelfth-night, the Host stole away to Chippenham, and overran all the land of the West Saxons, and sat them down there. And many of the folk drave they over-sea, and, of the rest, they brought under the most, and forced them to yield to their sway, save only King Alfred. And he, with a small band, gat him away to the woods, and that hardly, and to the fastnesses of the fens.

And that same winter came [Hubba] the brother of Ingwar and Halfdene with 23 ships unto Devonshire in Wessex. And there was he slain, and 840 of his folk with him; and there was taken the war-flag which they called the Raven.[3]

After this, at Easter [23rd March], King Alfred, with a small band, wrought him a stronghold at Athelney. And from this stronghold ever and anon fought they against the Host.

Then in the seventh week after Easter rode he to Egbert's Stone, on the east of Selwood. And there came in unto him all the men

1 See p. 28. 2 See Chron. St. Neot's, § 10.

3 See Asser, § 60.

of Somerset, and the Wiltshire men, and of the Hampshire men such as were yet on this side the water. And right glad they were of him. And next day he went on thence to Iglea, and next day again to Ethandun. And there fought he against all the whole Host, and put them to flight, and chased them even unto their stronghold; and there he sat fourteen nights. Then did the Host give him sureties, with many an oath, that they would leave his kingdom. And they plighted unto him their troth that their King should undergo Baptism, and this they fulfilled even so as they had sworn.

And, some three weeks after, came unto him King Guthrum, with some thirty more, the worthiest men in the Host, at Alre, near Athelney. And in Baptism the King was his Godfather. And his chrism-loosing was at Wedmore. And twelve nights abode he with the King; and many a worthy gift gave he to him and his.

879. This year the Host from Chippenham fared to Cirencester, and sat there one year. And that same year there drew together a gang of pirates, and sat them down at Fulham on Thames.

And the sun was eclipsed for one hour of the day. [8 Oct. 878.]

880. This year fared the Host from Cirencester into East Anglia, and settled there, and shared out that land. And the Host that erewhile abode at Fulham fared over sea to Ghent in Frank-land, and there sat one year.

881. This year went that Host further into Frank-land. And the Franks fought with them. And then was the Host there horsed, after that fight.

882. This year went the Host far up into Frank-land along the Maese. And there they sat one year.

And King Alfred put to sea with his ships, and fought with four ship-crews of Danish men. And two of them he took, and all on board were slain. And two yielded them to him; and sore broken and wounded were they ere that yielding.

883. This year fared the Host up the Scheldt to Conde, and sat there the year.

And Marinus the Pope sent to King Alfred no small bit of the Lord's Rood. And that same year Sighelm and Athelstane bare to Rome the alms that the King had vowed to send thither, and eke to India, to St. Thomas and St. Bartholomew, when they

sat down against the Host that was in London. And there, thanks be to God, was the end of that vow full largely fulfilled unto them.

884. This year went the Host up the Somme to Amiens, and there sat one year.

885. This year the aforesaid Host parted in twain. The one band went eastward, the other to Rochester, and sat down against the town, and wrought another stronghold round about them. Notwithstanding this, the townsfolk held out till King Alfred came forth with his muster. Then fled the Host to their ships, and left their stronghold. Of their horses eke were they spoiled[1]; and eftsoon hied them in this wise over sea.

And, from Kent, King Alfred sent his fleet unto East Anglia. So soon as they came into Stour-mouth then met them 16 pirate ships; and they fought therewith, and took the ships, one and all, and slew the ship-men. And even as they wended homeward with the spoil there met them a great fleet of pirates, and that very day fought them. And the Danish men won that day.

That same year, before mid-winter, died Carloman, King of the Franks, slain by a wild boar. And, one year before, his brother [Louis III.] had died; he too held the West Realm [modern France]. Both these were sons of Louis, who also held the West Realm: and he was son of Charles [the Bald], whose daughter Ethelwulf, King of the West Saxons, had to Queen.

And that same year a mighty fleet drew together against the Old Saxons [near the mouth of the Elbe], and two great fights had they that one year, and the Saxons had the best of it, and the Frisians [of Holland] along with them.

That same year did Charles [the Fat] take on the West Realm, yea, and all the sway on this side the Wendel Sea[2] [the Mediterranean] and beyond it [*i.e.* in Italy] in like wise as his great-grandfather [Charlemagne] held it, save the Lid-wiccas [Bretons] only. This Charles was son of Louis, and he was brother of Charles (father of Judith), and they were sons of Louis. And he was son of Charles the Elder[3] [Charlemagne], and he of Pepin.

And the same year died the good Pope Marinus, who at the prayer of Alfred, King of the West Saxons, freed the English

1 Literally "they were behorsed" (like *behead*).

2 This name is an interesting reminiscence of the days, three centuries back, when the Vandal fleets of Carthage scourged every shore in the Mediterranean.

3 *Elder* simply means *First*, as we speak of Edward the Elder.

School; and sent him withal great gifts, and a bit of the Rood whereon hung Christ.

886. This year that Host which erewhile went eastward [in 885] came westward again, and so up the Seine, and sat down for the winter hard by Paris.

That same year did King Alfred build again London; and all England [*Anglecyn*] came in unto him, save they who were held in bondage of the Danish men; and he gave over the town to the ward of Ethelred the Alderman.

887. This year went the Host up through Paris Bridge, and so along Seine unto the Marne, and thence up the Marne to Chezy, and sat them down there and on the Yonne, two winters in the two places.

* * * * *

And Ethelhelm the Alderman bare the alms of the West Saxons and Alfred unto Rome.

888. This year Beocca the Alderman bare the alms to Rome. And Queen Elswitha [widow of Burghred of Mercia], King Alfred's sister, died on the way thither, and lieth at Padua. . . .

889. This year was there no going to Rome, save that King Alfred sent two errand-doers with letters.[1]

890. This year Abbot Beornhelm bare the alms to Rome.

And Guthrum, the Norseman King, died. In Baptism was he hight Athelstan, and he was King Alfred's Godson [see 878]; and in East Anglia he abode, and first settled that land.

And this year the Host went from the Seine to St. Lo, which is between Brittany and France. And the Bretons fought against them, and won the field, and drave them down into the river, and drowned full many.

This year was Plegmund chosen of God and of all the people to the Archbishopric of Canterbury.

891. This year went the Host eastward. And King Arnulf, with the East Franks, and Saxons, and Bavarians, fought with the horsemen thereof, ere the ships came up, and put them to flight.

And three Scots came to King Alfred in a rudderless boat, from Ireland, whence they had stolen away, for that they would fain, for

[1] The reason for this unique break in Alfred's constant intercourse with Rome was that this one year Rome had fallen under the domination of two scandalous female tyrants, still execrated as the *Donne cattive*, who made and unmade a whole set of wretched Popelings in a few months, and generally rendered Rome impossible for decent folk.

God's love, be in pilgrimage, they recked not whither. Their boat was made of two hides and a half; and they took with them seven days' victual. And about the seventh day came they to shore in Cornwall, and eftsoon went unto King Alfred. Dubslane were they hight, and Macbeth, and Maclinnum [Maclean].

892. This year, after Easter, about Rogation-tide [29 May], or sooner, showed there that star which in Latin is called Comet. In English some folk call it Hairy Star, because there stream from it long beams of brightness, awhile on the one side, awhile on the other side.

893. This year the mighty Host, whereof we spoke afore, came again from the East Realm[1] westward to Boulogne. And there were they shipped, and so came over at one go, horses and all. And they came to land, with 250 ships, at Lymne-mouth, a harbour in East Kent, at the east end of that great weald which we call Andread.[2] This weald is in length, from east to west, 112 miles or more, and in breadth 30 miles. And the aforesaid stream floweth out of the weald. Up this stream they towed their ships as far as the weald, four miles from the harbour without; and there stormed they a stronghold, wherein were only a few men, and they but churls, and it was moreover but half wrought.

Then, soon after, came Hasting, with 80 ships, to land at Thames-mouth, and wrought him a stronghold at Milton. And the other Host did the like at Appledore.

894. . . . Now the Northumbrians and the East Angles had plighted sworn troth unto King Alfred, and the East Angles given six sureties thereto. Nevertheless, so oft as these other Hosts raided forth in force, then fared they forth also, clean against troth, either with them, or for their own hand. Thereupon gathered King Alfred his muster, and went onward till he was between the two Hosts, and there he camped (as near as he might, for the wood fastnesses and the water fastnesses), so that, should either come out into the open, he might with all speed be upon them. Thence onward went out the foe by bands along the weald, on whichever edge might be bare of force. And almost every day (and night) were they hunted down by other like bands, either of the King's

1 Austrasia, the land of the East Franks, between the Rhine and the Elbe.

2 From the Roman city of Anderida, near Pevensey, destroyed at the English conquest. The name has long been lost: but the Weald is still 'the Weald.'

force or of the burghers'. His own muster had the King parted in twain, so that the one part was ever at home, the other in the field; besides those men whose charge it was to ward the towns. Twice only did the Host come out in full force from where they sat; once at their first landing, ere our muster was gathered, and again when they would forsake their fastness.

Much spoil, then, had they taken, and would fain go into Essex unto their ships, over Thames, northward. Then did the King's force outride and get before them; and at Farnham they fought with them, and put the Host to flight, and took back the spoil. And they fled over Thames, where was no ford, and so up the Colne into an island. Then our muster there beset them so long as they had there any meat; but at length they outstayed their time [of service] and their meat was all eaten. By then was the King on his way thither, and his own war band with him, but, even as he drew nigh, off went the other force home again. And the Danish men abode there still, for their King was wounded in that fight, so that they might not bear him off.

Then the Danes who dwell among the Northumbrians and among the East Angles gathered some hundred ships, and went south about, and some forty went north about.[1] And these beset a stronghold by the sea in North Devon, and the others, which went south, beset Exeter.

When the King heard that, then he turned him westward to Exeter, and all his force with him, save one very strong band. Eastward went on these till they came to London, and then did the townsmen and this western aid make on eastward yet, even unto Beamfleet. Thither, by then, was come Hasting, with his band which erewhile sat at Milton. And thither also was come the great Host which at first sat at Appledore by Lymne-mouth. The stronghold at Beamfleet had already been wrought by Hasting, and he, as at that time, was out harrying, but the great Host were at home.

Then came they thereto, and put to flight the Host, and stormed the stronghold, and took all that was therein, the goods, and the women, and eke the children, and brought all into London. And all the ships they brake in pieces or else burned, or brought them into London or into Rochester. And the wife of Hasting brought

[1] This is still amongst coasters the techical sea term for rounding Scotland.

they to the King, and his two sons; and afterwards he gave them back, inasmuch as the one was his own Godson, and the other Godson to Ethelred the Alderman. They had stood their Godfathers ere Hasting came to Beamfleet, and then had Hasting handed over to the King many sureties and sworn many oaths, and the King had given him many gifts; and so he gave back his boys and his wife. But no sooner came he to Beamfleet, and had wrought his stronghold, than he harried the King's lands, yea, those very lands which were in ward of Ethelred his own gossip. And again the second time was he gone out to that self-same harrying when his stronghold was stormed.

Now, as I said before, the King and his forces had turned westward to Exeter, and the Host had beset the town; but at his coming off they went to their ships. And while the King was thus busy in the West, then drew together both the other Hosts at Shoebury in Essex, and wrought them there a stronghold, and then both together hied them up along Thames. And many came there in to them, as well from the East Angles as from the Northumbrians. So up the Thames went they, and came even unto the Severn.

Then Ethelred the Alderman, and Ethelm the Alderman, and Ethelnoth the Alderman, and the King's Thanes who were then at home in the strongholds, gathered their men from every town from the Parret eastward (as well west as east of Selwood), and those north of Thames and west of Severn, and some also of the North-Welsh folk. So they drew them all together, and came up with the Host at Buttington on Severn, in a fastness; and there they beset them round on every side. Many weeks sat they there, on either bank of the river, while the King was westward, against the fleet, in Devon. Then were the foe straitened for lack of food, and of their horses they had eaten the most part and the rest were starved for hunger. Thus burst they forth upon them that beset the stream eastward, and fought with them, and the Christians won the day. And there were slain a many of the King's Thanes, and of the Danish men was there a very great slaughter; and they who got off fled them away.

So they that were left alive came again into Essex to their stronghold and to their ships. And once again ere winter gathered they a great host, from the East Angles and from the Northumbrians;

and their wives, and their ships, and their wealth, gave they into ward of the East Angles, and hied them, at one stretch, day and night, to a waste chester in Wirrall, which hight Legaceaster [Chester]. Then might not our muster come up with them ere they were within the stronghold; yet beset they the stronghold round about some two days, and took all the cattle there without, and slew such as they might overtake outside the stronghold. And all the corn in the neighbourhood did they burn, or ate it, they and their horses, day by day. And this was about a twelvemonth since first they came over sea hither.

895. Nor long was it ere, in this year, the Host went among the North Welsh, out of Wirrall; for there they might not abide, seeing they had been spoiled both of the cattle and of the corn. Then turned they again from North Wales, with the spoil they made there, and through Northumberland they went and through East Anglia, and never might our muster overtake them ere they came to the easternmost land of Essex, to an island out at sea, hight Mersey.

And the Host that had beset Exeter turned also homewards, and on their way they would harry the South Saxons by Chichester. And the townsfolk put them to flight, and slew them by hundreds, and took some of their ships.

Then that same year, before winter, the Danish-men who sat down in Mersey, towed their ships up the Thames, and thence up the Lea. This was some two years since their coming in hither over sea.

896. This year the aforesaid Host wrought them a stronghold on the Lea, twenty miles above London. And, in summer, a great body of the townsmen, and other folk beside, went forth even unto this stronghold. And there were they put to flight, and there were slain some four of the King's Thanes. And, after, throughout harvest, did the King camp hard by the town [London], while the folk were reaping, that the Danes might not rob them of their crop.

Then one day the King rode along the stream, and saw where it might be shut in, so that never might they bring out their ships. And thus was it done, and they wrought them two strongholds on the two sides of the stream. When this work was now begun, and the camp pitched thereby, then saw the Host that they might not bring out their ships. Then forsook they the ships, and away

across the land till they came unto Cwatbridge [Coatbridge, near Bridgenorth] on Severn, and there wrought they a stronghold.

Then rode our muster westwards after the Host. And the men of London took all those ships, and such as they might not bring away, them they brake up and such as were worth the taking,[1] them brought they to London. Howbeit, the Danish-men had made over their wives to the ward of the East Angles or ever they forsook their stronghold.

So sat they down for the winter at Bridgenorth. This was about three years since hither they came over sea to Lymne-mouth.

897. This year, in the summer, the Host broke up; some for East Anglia, and some for Northumbria. And they who were moneyless there took ship, and went southward over sea to the Seine.

Thanks be to God, the Host had not utterly broken down Angle-kin. But much more in these three years was it broken by the cattle-death and the death of men, and above all in that many of the highest among the King's Thanes died in that three years.

* * * * *

This same year did they of the Host who were among the East Angles and among the Northumbrians harass the West Saxons with bands of spoilers, and mostly on the south coast, above all by their 'esks,' which they had built many years before. Then bade King Alfred that long ships be built against the esks; and they were full-nigh twice as long; some had sixty oars, some more; both swifter were they, and steadier, and eke higher than the other. Neither like the Danish were they shapen, nor the Frisian, but so as seemed him to be most worth.

Then, in that same year, came there, upon a time, six ships unto the Isle of Wight, and much harm they did there, and in Devon also, and elsewhere on the sea-coast. Then bade the King nine of the new ships to go thither; and they blocked their way from the harbour to the sea without. Then went they [the Danes] with three ships out against them, and three lay aground in the upper harbour, and the men were ashore. Then took they [the English] two of the three ships in the outer harbour, and slew the ship-men. The other ship got away, though all the men were slain save five only, and they got off because our ships ran aground. They were

1 *Stælwyrthe.* This is the origin of our *stalwart.*

aground, too, most unhappily, for three lay on that side of the stream whereon lay the Danish ships aground, and the rest on the other side, so that none might get to other.

So, when the water had ebbed away from the ships many a furlong, then came out the Danes from their three ships against the three left on their side by the ebb, and fought with them. And there were slain . . . of all the men, Frisians and English, sixty and two; and of the Danish-men one hundred and twenty. Then came in the flood unto the Danish ships ere the Christians could push off, so they rowed them out. Nevertheless, so sorely were they broken that they could not row round Sussex, and there the sea cast two of them on shore. And the men were led unto the King, to Winchester, and there bade he hang them. And they in the one ship came unto East Anglia, sore wounded. And no fewer than twenty ships were utterly lost with all hands, in that same summer on the Sussex coast.

* * * * *

901. This year, six days before All-hallow-mass, Alfred, son of Ethelwulf died. King was he over all Angle-kin, save only that part which was under the Danish sway; and for thirty years, lacking one and a half, held he the kingdom. And Edward his son reigned in his stead.

III.

ETHELWERD.

THIRD in order amongst our authorities for the life of Alfred comes the work of 'Patricius Consul Fabius Quæstor Ethelwerdus,' who composed a chronicle from the Creation to A.D. 975, and dedicated it to his relative Matilda, like himself of the English blood-royal. His prologue tells us that she was lineally descended from Alfred, being the grand-daughter of the great Emperor Otho, who married a daughter of Edward the Elder. He adds that he himself was great-grandson to Ethelwald Clito, the nephew who was set aside that Alfred might ascend the throne. Matilda, who was the wife of Obizzo, Count of Milan, died in 1011. It is therefore not improbable that Ethelwerd is the noble of that name mentioned as having fallen fighting by the side of his kinsman Edmund Ironside in the terrible battle of Assingdon, A.D. 1016, which made Canute King of England.

Ethelwerd writes in Latin of the vilest kind, and takes his facts mostly from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, but very inaccurately, and with a few entries peculiar to himself. The only ancient MS. of his work perished in the fire of 1731, along with so many other of the Cottonian Collection. It was transcribed for Saville's 'Scriptores post Bedam' (1596), and has been re-edited by Petrie. This chronicle is divided into books and chapters, the entries relating to Alfred being found at the close of the third and the beginning of the fourth book.

Ethelwerd, however, almost never gives a date, merely referring to an event as so many years or months after such another event, so that his chronology is apt to be confused. His most valuable contribution to our period is his very spirited account of the campaign of 894, which reads as if it came out of some old ballad.

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ETHELWERD.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER III.

Of the sway of Athulf[1] *and his deeds.*

§ 1. After the death of Egbert, came Athulf to his Father's throne, and gave to his son Ethelstan[2] the realms of Kent and Essex and Surrey and Sussex. . . . Also King Ethelwulf sent his son Alfred to Rome, in the days of our Lord Pope Leo, who hallowed him to King, and stood his Godfather, even as at this day we are wont to take little children at the Bishop's hand and to call them our own. After Easter, in that year [853], King Ethelwulf gave his daughter in marriage to King Burghred.

§ 2. Again, after a year, the heathen wintered in Sheppey. In the same year [855] King Athulf gave a tenth of all that he had as the Lord's lot, and the same wont set he throughout all his realm. This year went he forth to Rome with great pomp, and there abode he twelve months. At his home-coming to his own land, Charles, King of the Franks, gave him his daughter in wedlock, and he brought her home with him [856]. King Athulf died one year after he came back [858], and his body resteth in the city of Winchester. And then was fulfilled the fiftieth year since King Egbert took the kingship.[3]

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

Of the reigns of the sons of King Athulf, namely Ethelbald and Ethelbyrht.

Meanwhile, after the death of King Athulf, his sons sat on his throne, to wit, Ethelbald over the West Angles[4] and Ethelbyrht over Kent, as well as over the East, South, and Middle Angles.[5]

1 *I.e.* Ethelwulf. The spelling throughout Ethelwerd's chronicle is exceedingly lax.

2 Afterwards St. Neot; see p. 18.

3 This entry is wrong; Egbert became King in the year 800.

4 *I.e.* Wessex.

5 Essex, Sussex, Middlesex. It is noteworthy that Ethelwerd uses the word 'Angle' as equivalent to 'Saxon,' but never *vice versa*.

When five years were fulfilled, King Ethelbald died [860], and his brother Ethelbyrht took on his power along with his own. In his days came there to land a mighty heathen fleet, and wasted the royal city which is called Winton. Then was their onset stayed by Osric, Chief of the province of Hamtun-shire, and Athulf, Chief of Berkshire. Followed a fight; and these chieftains put the heathen to flight and won the day. Then four years after the death of Ethelbald the heathen make them a stronghold in the Isle of Thanet [864], and plight their troth to the men of Kent to be at peace with them, who on their part make ready a fee-boot, lacking wit to foresee what should come. But the Danes break their troth, and stealing forth privily by night lay waste all the Eastern coasts of Kent. Then after one year King Ethelbald died [866], and his body lieth in peace in the minster called *Scireburne* [Sherborne].

Chapter II.

Of the reign of King Ethelred.

§ 1. Then did Ethelred follow in the kingship, after the death of his brother Ethebyrht. And in the same year [866] did the fleets of the tyrant Igware reach the land of the Angles, and they wintered among the East Angles. There they pile their arms, mount on horses, and make peace with the folk. Then, after a year [867], that host left the Eastern shores, and crossed Humber, and went forward into the province of Northumbria, as far as the city Evoraca, now called Eoferwic [York]. There chanced, at that time, to be a grievous civil discord among the folk of that part; for so mad were they that they drave from his rightful seat their King Osbyrht; and with fixed purpose of heart they one and all choose some nameless churl for their King. Yet, after long tarrying, they turn their mind to the need of taking up arms against the inrushing foe. Each King collects no small force; already do they mark the foe at a halt within their dykes; but, alas, they kindle in each other's rage; on both sides is there fell slaughter, and both Kings fall on the spot. They who were left of either side now make peace with the foemen's host.

* * * * *

§ 2. Then, after another year [868], did the Heathen host, whose coming we have just told, fix their camp at Nottingham and

there wintered; and Burghed, King of Mercia, with his Witan, was fain to let them stay there unhurt. But, at the year's end [869], this host removed to York, and there did they camp for the winter.

§ 3. After staying one year [870], they removed yet again, passed through Mercia to the realm of the East Angles, and took up their abode for the winter at Thetford. Against this host did King Edmund hold out for a short space; but they slew him there, and his body lieth buried at a place called Beadorices-wyrthe. The barbarians indeed won the day, but at the cost of their King's life, for Iwar died that same year. . . .

§ 4. In the course of the next year [871] the aforesaid host of the barbarians marched on to Reading; for this most impious crew were keenly eager to attack the West Saxons. So that within three days of their coming, their two chieftains were proudly prancing about on horseback, though naturally unskilled in the art of riding, and, forgetful of their seamanship, went galloping over the fields and through the woods. . . . But Ethelwulf the Alderman was a match for them. Though small was his band, yet bare they brave hearts and hardy breasts; they aim their shafts, they turn the foe, they joy in abundant spoil.

§ 5. At length, four days after this fight, cometh up King Ethelred with his host; nor may it be told what fight rageth, and how fiercely, between them: first one side, then the other, presseth on with their spears in unbroken order; the noble Ethelwulf falls, who had so late had the victory; and at the last the barbarians gain the mastery. The body of the aforenamed chief is carried off by stealth, and taken into the land of Mercia, to a place called Northworthige, but in the Danish tongue Derby.

§ 6. Again, after four days, King Ethelred, with his brother Alfred, met in arms with the whole heathen host at Aescesdune [Ashdown]. Fell was the slaughter on either hand, but King Ethelred at the last won the palm of victory. . . . And, so to speak, all the best of the barbarian youth fell there; and never before nor since has such slaughter been heard tell of throughout the whole time that Saxons have held Britain. . . .

§ 7. Yet, after fourteen days, was their courage renewed, and they fought at a place called Basingon. Soon cross they swords: little by little the barbarians begin to hold their own; each side hopes to win; the King's troops are cheated; the cunning foemen

hold the stronger ground, and get them the victory, yet without its spoils.

§ 8. Once again, after two months, the aforesaid King Ethelred, with his brother Alfred, renews the fight at Merton against the whole heathen host, and many are there slain on either hand, and the barbarians gain the palm of victory. . . . Lastly, in the year following the aforesaid fight, after Easter, King Ethelred, from whose lineage I am sprung departed this life.

§ 9. And now, my beloved cousin Matilda, I will begin to set forth my subject more clearly for you . . . and begin my tale with the sons of Athulf. There were five brothers; the first was Ethelstan, who shared the kingdom with his father; the second was Ethelbald, King of the West Angles; the third Ethelbyrht, King of Kent; the fourth Ethelred, who was my grandfather's grandfather; the fifth Alfred, who held the whole sway after all the others, and he also was your grandfather's grandfather. . . .

Chapter III.

Of the reign of King Alfred.

§ 1. After these things Alfred gat the sway over all the lands of Britain, when his brothers were dead, for he was the last of all the sons of Athulf. A countless host came that summer to Reading, and eagerly set on the army of the West Angles; and they who had been long raiding the land thereabout came to their aid. The English army was as then but small, seeing their King was away, for he was then at his brother's burial; but though their ranks were thin, yet was their courage firm within them. Rejoicing in the fight they first drive their foes afar, but at length, worn down with weariness, stay their hand from battle. The barbarians thus win the victory, howbeit a barren one: afterwards they spread themselves, and with stout threats of pillage plunder the country.

§ 2. During the time of their most hateful tyranny were three battles fought by the Angles, besides those already told, and eleven of their consuls, whom they call 'earls,' perished, and one of their Kings. At last, in the same year, the West Angles make peace with them. And the tale of the years passed to the sitting down of this barbarian host before Reading, and to the death of King

Ethelred and the kingship of his brother Alfred, was from the time when their grandfather Ecgbyrht gat the monarchy 71. And from the time when the war was between Mercians and West Angles at the place called Ellandune, when King Ecgbyrht gat him the victory,[1] were passed 47 years; and from the fight at Pedredan[2] 26, and from that in the wood of Aclea 20. And, lastly, from the coming of the heathen to the land of the the East Angles, 5 years. And then, with no long stay, reach we their coming unto Reading.

§ 3. After the space of one year from their coming unto Reading [872], they fixed their camp hard by the city of London. And the Mercians make agreement with them and pay tribute. One year after [873], these barbarians change their settlement to the neighbourhood of the city Lindisse, in a place called Turccsige; and the Mercians make a new peace with them. Yet, after but one year [874], the barbarians shift their leaguer to Repton, and drive King Burhred from his realm over seas. The tale of years past since he took over his father's kingdom was 22. Next they break the peace, and harry the Mercian land. The aforesaid King cast not away his hope in Christ, but of set mind betook him to Rome. And there he died, and his body, laid in a worthy tomb, lieth in the temple of the Holy Mother of Christ, now commonly called the English School. Then did Ceolf hold the Mercian realm.

§ 4. Again, after another year [875], the barbarians divide the land into two lots. Healfdene, their leader, took the one part, to wit, that of the Northumbrians; he chose for his winter-stead the neighbourhood of the River Tyne, and all around laid he waste the land on every side. And ofttimes harried they the Picts[3] and the men of Cumberland.[4] Oscytel, however, and Guthrum, and Annuth, three of their kings, with a mighty host, shift them from Repton to a place called Grantan-bricge [Cambridge], and there abide twelve months. Moreover, in the summer of this same year, did King Alfred put to sea with his ship-force, and there met him the barbarian fleet with seven tall vessels: followed therefrom a fight; the Danes flee; and one of their ships is taken by the King. . . .

1 This was the decisive battle which freed Wessex from Mercia (Introduction, II., § 46).

2 At Puriton, near Parret-mouth, in 745.

3 The Picts dwell beyond the Forth, in Scotland; their name became lost in that of the Scots (originally immigrants from Ireland) in the eleventh century.

4 Cumberland was a British kingdom, extending at this time from the Clyde to the Ribble. It was also called Strathclyde.

§ 5. And in this year did the host from Cambridge join its force with that of the western host, which never before had they done, near the town called Wareham; and they harried the most of that part. The King also made a peace with them, and paid unto them tribute. They, in turn, give him sureties, chosen men, such as seemed to their Kings the meetest in the host; and they make oath to him on their sacred arm-rings, which to the Kings of other lands they had never done, and they would leave his bounds with all speed. But they break the peace and eke their troth; and in the next year they enter the land of Devonshire, with a vast band of warriors, and camp them for the winter at the city of Exeter. Lastly do their fleets set sail and put to sea: but there arose a mighty storm, so that no small part of them, namely 100 of their very best ships, sank near a rock called Swanawic [Swanage]. The barbarians now renew the peace, with intent to deceive, and more hostages gave they than were asked for. For they sware to withdraw their force from the lands of the illustrious King Alfred, and they did so.

§ 6. Harrying, then, the kingdom of Mercia, they drive out every freeman, and after marching up and down the land, they set up their abode at the town of Gloucester.[1] Thus ere the year was past [878], did this vile crew break faith with the West Angles, though ratified by strong oath. And they took up their winter-stead at Chippenham. But their horse rode over the necks of much people, so that the folk there had no place of refuge from their tyranny, and all hearts turned speedily against them. Then, with overweening wickedness, drave they many over-sea to the shores of Gaul.

§ 7. As for King Alfred, he was in truth at this time more straitened than well became him. Ethelnoth also, Chief of the province of Somerset, abode with a small band in a certain wood; and they built them a stronghold, after a sort, on the isle of Aethelingaige [Athelney], which lieth, it seems, in a marsh. But the aforesaid King, along with the whole province of Somerset, ceased not ever to meet in daily onsets with the barbarians. Yet did none other help, save those who were fed at the King's cost.

§ 8. In the same year came there Healfdene, brother of the

[1] This attempt to form a Danish settlement in the Severn Valley is only told us by Ethelwerd.

tyrant Igwar, with 30 keels, to the land of the West Angles, and they beset Odda, chief leader of the province of Devon, in a certain stronghold, and lighted up the fires of war both within and without. There fell the King of the barbarians, and 80 decades with him; and the Danes at last win the field.[1]

§ 9. Meanwhile, after Easter in that year, King Alfred hazarded a battle against the host that lay at Chippenham, at a place called Ethandune, and theirs is the honour of the day. But, after this issue of the day, the barbarians promise peace, beg for truce, refuse not sureties, and bind themselves by oath. Their King, moreover, submitted him to Baptism, and King Alfred, as Godfather, took him up from the font in the marshy Isle of Athelney. Ethelnoth the Chieftain also purified the same King after his Baptism, at a place called Wedmore, and there King Alfred loaded him with splendid honours. Then one year [879] from the day that the Heathen host had set forth from the city of Gloucester, came it to the town of Cirencester, and there abode for the winter. In the course of this year the sun was eclipsed. In the year following this eclipse [880], the aforesaid host left Cirencester for the land of the East Angles; there pitched they camp, and brought beneath their sway the whole folk there. Fourteen years had now been fulfilled since the barbarians first had wintered in the aforesaid lands, and therein had been horsed.

§ 10. Moreover, in the same year, after all the aforesaid land had been brought under them, set they sail for Gaul, and set themselves down at a place called Ghent, the self-same leaguer who had erst pitched their camp at Fulham. After a year [881] they would go further, but the armies of the Franks set on them so strongly that they win the day, and the barbarians are put to flight. Yet a year [882] and the aforesaid host passed into the upper lands of the River Maese, and set their camp at Escelum. And, the next year [883], that same host set out for the lands above the Scald, at a place called Cundath [Condé], and there pitched their winter camp. One year after [884], befell there a grievous slaughtering done by the aforesaid host in the upper lands of the Somme near the town of Embenum [Amiens], and there camp they that winter.

1 This is against the earlier authorities. But Gaimar must have known something of the same tradition, when he makes the Danes find and bury Hubba (v., 314).

§ 11. Then, the next year [885], they divide, and spread over the land in two bodies; the one making for Lofenum [Louvain], and the other for Rochester, and they sat down before both these towns, also making them other smaller camps. The land-folk are worn down by loss, till King Alfred comes up with the men of the West. Then this foul pest is at length stamped out. They seek more strength; the King bade 'Sarauara'[1] to be led to the coast, with horses not a few; they fall back to their stronghold; some fly over sea. In this year they renew the peace, giving sureties to the English, and twice in the year divide they the spoil gotten by fraud, in the densely wooded parts hard by the southern bank of the River Thames. The filthy crew, then holding under sway the East Angles, find them food, and suddenly do they break out towards Beamfleet. There does their gathering break up, with ill omen: some stay, some make off beyond the sea.

§ 12. Then in the same year, the aforesaid King Alfred sent a fleet to the coasts of the East Angles, and, even as they came in, there met them sixteen ships at Stourmouth. These are taken, their captains slain with the sword. Therewith beareth down the rest of the pirate fleet on that of Alfred; they ply their oars, they strike sail, their arms glitter on the affrighted wave, and in the end the barbarians have the victory.

§ 13. In that same year did Charles the Younger follow on to the sway of all western Gaul, even to the Tyrrhenian sea [the Mediterranean], and, so to speak, to the whole empire of his great grandfather [Charlemagne], save only the land of Lidwicon [Britanny]. His father was Louis [the German], brother of the midmost Charles [the Bald], whose daughter Ethelwulf, King of the English, had wedded. And these two were sons of Louis, and he was the son of Charlemagne, and he was the son of Pepin. In the same year departed the blessed Pope Marinus, who freed the English School, which to this day stands at Rome, by the foresight of King Alfred; and he sent him as gift a portion of the thrice-blessed Cross of Christ, in Whom shineth forth the salvation of the world.

§ 14. In the same year also, the aforesaid noisome horde break their troth, and make armed onset upon King Alfred. Then, one year later, they seek the lower parts of Gaul, and settle down for

[1] This is hopelessly corrupt. Indeed, the whole passage teems with blunders.

good [in Normandy] near the River Seine that winter. Meanwhile the city of London is fortified by King Alfred, so that the rage of civil war could never again bring it under, either by force or fraud. Him did all men hail as their deliverer, the Saxons above all, save only the barbarians, and those who beneath their sway were then held captive. And after the defences there were well strengthened, the aforesaid King set over it Ethelred [Alderman of Mercia] as the Warden thereof.

§ 15. Now [887] the host which then was harrying Gaul cut its way through the bridge of the stronghold of Paris, and wasted the whole land of the Seine even unto the Marne, and upwards towards its source, as far as Chézy, and there thrice they wintered. . . .

[Here follows an account of the commotions on the Continent after the death of Charles.]

Moreover in the same year wherein the barbarians sat down against the bridge at Paris, Ethelhelm the Alderman took no small part of the alms from the diocese of the English, paid by the King for his folk, and therewith wended him to Rome. In the same year died Elswitha the Queen [of Mercia, Alfred's sister].

§ 16. Then, in the next year after [890], the Abbot Byrnhelm took unto Rome the alms for the people, and in especial those of the Western Angles and of King Alfred. Then did Guthrum, King of the Northern Angles, give up his soul to Orcus. He had taken the name of Ethelstan at the laver of baptism from his Godfather King Alfred; and his home was mostly amongst the East Angles, since he had there first settled him.

§ 17. In the same year the aforesaid host came up from the River Seine to a place called Sandlaudan [St. Lo], which lieth between the Bretons and the Franks. Then did the Bretons meet them in open field, and won the prize of victory, and pursued them along the windings of a certain river, and not a few of them were drowned in the waters. Then one year after [891] certain bands of the aforesaid host make way into the eastern parts of France. King Arnulf met them, and there was a horse fray ere the fleet came up by water. Then came there in a body of East-Franks and Saxons and Bavarians, and thereon did the heathen set sail and flee.

§ 18. In the same year three elect men of Hybernian race, drawn from home by fervent faith, privily make them a boat, by sewing ox-hides together, take with them a week's victual, sail on

seven days and nights, and are borne unto the coast of Cornwall. Here, leaving their boat (which had been guided by no gear of theirs, nor by strength of arm, but rather by the will of Him who ruleth all things), they reach King Alfred, who, with his Witan, rejoiceth at their coming. Next bend they their steps to Rome, as the teachers of Christ are oftenest wont to do, and thence their heart moveth them to seek Jerusalem. At length the chiefest among them departeth in the way, and one of the brethren finds himself left in charge of the relics of this dear comrade; (and also many miracles were wrought, the whole of which may not be told in this short tale). For the third, shaking off the dust from his feet, cometh back home, and reports the names of the exiles thus :—first Dufslan, next Macheathath, third Magilmumen, a man learned in the Arts, skilled in Letters, and a noted teacher among the Irish.

§ 19. Also in the same year, after Easter, during the Rogation Week, there shone forth a comet; which some think to signify that a rough time is now passed away: but the more approved interpretation of the wise seemeth to be that comets foretell things to come, as hath been shown by manifold experience.

§ 20. Then one year from the time when the barbarians waged war against King Arnulf they come to Bononia [Boulogne], and there build them a fleet, set sail, and come over into England, and pass in their ships up the mouth of the River Limne to Poldre [Appledore] in East Kent. And there do they overthrow an ancient stronghold, for there was but a small band of churls therein; and there fix they their winter-stead. Also in this year Hæsten comes in with no small fleet to the banks of the River Thames, and they make them a stronghold at a place called Middletune [Milton] on the coast of Kent, and there pitch they camp for the winter. Then the number of the years from the glorious Nativity[1] of our Saviour amounted to D.CCC.XC.III.

§ 21. After the Easter of that year the host come in from Gaul set forth, and marched through the depths of the mighty forest commonly called Andredeswood[2]; and they join hands with the

1 The reckoning of the Christian Year from Christmas Day, instead of Lady Day, is found in writers of this period It was convenient as making the new year begin approximately with the Civil Year, which in Imperial Rome, as now, commenced January 1. See p. 87. This is the only date Ethelwerd gives.

2 The Weald of Sussex.

East Angles, and so on step by step, to harry the neighbouring lands of Hamtun-scire and Bearrucscire. Then were these things told to Eadward the Etheling, son of King Alfred, then at his work among the South Angles.[1] Next meet they the West Angles, who with stout threats and full muster forlet them at Farnham. Without stop or stay the Saxon youth leap on the foe, being cheered by the coming of their Prince. With glad heart do they spring to arms. Like sheep under ward of their shepherd they delight in their wonted spoil. There is the tyrant wounded; with joy they drive his squalid hordes northward over Thames. The while the Danes are beleagured in Thornige[2] Island, King Ethelred [of Mercia] aided the Prince, sallying forth from the city of London. The barbarians pray peace-troth, sureties are given, they undertake wholly to forsake the realm of the King aforesaid[3]; and at once fulfil their words in very deed. In the end they set forth for the land of the East Angles, and then what was left of the host was in the realm of Edmund, King erewhile, and Saint. And their ships, with a furthering breeze, fly round to them from the mouth of the Limne to Mersey, a place in Kent.[4]

§ 22. In this same year Hæsten breaks out with his savage host from Beamfleet, and cruelly harries the whole land of Mercia, until they come even to the marches of Britain [*i.e.* the Welsh border]. The host which was then in the East, and eke that of the Northumbrians, find them in all they need. Then hard upon them followeth the far-famed chieftain, Athelm, with all his horsemen; and yet another leader, Ethelnoth, presseth on their rear with the men of the West Angles. There cometh up also King Ethelred, Lord of the Mercians, and dasheth himself eagerly upon them. Both sides join in battle; the youth on either part mingle in the fray; the English at last win the field. These mighty deeds, as old writers tell, happened at Buttingtune [on the Severn]. Yea, moreover, and the utmost efforts of the Danes are found all too weak: once more they make peace, they refuse not sureties, they pledge them to leave those parts. And in the same year the Danish strong-

1 Sussex being part of his appanage, as heir-apparent.

2 This island was at the mouth of the Colne (Asser).

3 *I.e.* Ethelred, who though only called Alderman was practically under-King of Mercia.

4 Really in Essex.

hold in Beamfleet is broken up by the strength and goodwill of the folk thereabout, and the wealth therein they part among them.

§ 23. After this, Sigeferth, a pirate, coasteth along Northumbria with a fleet of adventurers, and twice doth he harry that coast, and then bendeth his course to his own settlements. And after two full years came a mighty fleet from Boulogne and reached Limne, a town of the Angles. Then set forth the noble Ethelnoth from the West, and sallied out from the city of York against the foe, who wasted no small tract in the land of Mercia, to the west of Stamford; that is between the bank of the Welland and the thick wood commonly called Ceoftefne [Charnwood]. And, one year after, died Guthfrid, King of the Northumbrians, on the birthday of St. Bartholomew, the Apostle of Christ, and his body lieth buried at York, in the chief church there. Yet four years after (from the death of the aforesaid King), there arose great and perilous feud among the Angles, for that in Northumbria the foul Danish force abode still.

§ 24. Finally, in the self-same year, the great-hearted Alfred, King of the Saxons, departed from this world:—the steadfast stay of the West Saxons, full of justice, bold in arms, learned of speech, and, beyond all else, filled with lore divine. He had turned into his own tongue from the Latin, with skill of word, an untold number of volumes, of most varied contents; and in such surpassing wise that not only to the learned, but even to the casual hearer, the sad book of Boethius seemeth in some sort to live again.

This King died on the seventh day before the Feast of All Saints, and his body resteth in peace in the city of Winchester. O my reader, pray thou thus:

'Christ, Redeemer, save his soul.'

NOTE, § 23.

This paragraph reads at first sight as a confused repetition of § 20, the South-Saxon river Limne being mistaken for the East Anglian town Lynn, in Norfolk. But it is possible that Ethelwerd's information (though not in any other writer) may be founded on historical fact. The Danes, who had fled to France (p. 151), may well have tried one more landing at Lynn, and raided thereabout. Nor is it even impossible (strange as it seems) that Ethelnoth, the Alderman of Somerset, may really have been at York about this time. We know that he was at Buttington in North Wales (§ 22), and that the English forces thence pursued the Danes into Northumbria.

IV.

SIMEON OF DURHAM.

'THE DEEDS OF THE KINGS OF ENGLAND.'

SIMEON of Durham, the most picturesque of all our authorities for this period, wrote early in the twelfth century, his history ending in 1129. It is chiefly derived from earlier writings, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Asser, etc., but frequently contains traces of some independent poetical source. The spirit-stirring account of the Battle of Ashdown (§§ 23-31) in particular bears every mark of being founded on an old war-song, such as Macaulay has elaborated from the pages of Livy in the 'Lays of Rome.'

Simeon gives a double recension of this portion of his history. The following translation is from the first, with the leading additional touches found in the second, which are but few in number.

Only one MS. of the work is known, that in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (No. cxxxix.), which dates from the twelfth century. It has been printed by Twysden in his 'Decem Scriptores,' and (as far as 978) by Petrie and Hardy in their 'Monumenta Britannica.' Translations have been published in Bohn's Historical Series and in 'The Church Historians of England.'

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SIMEON OF DURHAM.

§ 1. In the year of our Lord's Incarnation 849, there sprang up a light out of darkness. Then was born in the town royal, called by the English Wantage, Alfred, King of the English. . . .

[Here Simeon gives a long pedigree of Alfred through forty-two descents, up to Adam, dwelling specially on the greatness of Ina, King of Wessex, six generations back.]

§ 2. The mother of King Alfred was named Osburga, a woman deeply devout, and thereto keen of wit withal, great of heart, as high in place; and her father hight Oslac, the true and trusty cup-bearer of King Ethelwulf. . . .

[Here follows Oslac's pedigree, from Asser, § 4.]

§ 3. In the year 851 (the third of Alfred's age . . . came there a mighty host of Heathen with 350 ships, to Thames mouth. Then sacked they Dorobernia [Canterbury] . . . and, growing ever bolder, gathered all their force in Suthrige [Surrey]. Then did Ethelwulf, the warrior King of the West Saxons, along with his son Ethelbald, likewise get them together no small army, in the place men call Aclea [Ockley], that is, the Oak-Plain. There were seen, in bright and clashing armour, the flower of English folk; and long was the fight between the Danes and the English, who fought the more hardily for seeing their King bear himself so well in fight, and thus showed themselves better men than their foes. Manfully did they strive, for long and long; and bravely and stoutly was the fray kept up by both sides. And the most part of the Heathen horde was utterly overthrown and put to rout, so that never, in any land, either before or since, have so many in one day met their death. Thus, that selfsame day, did the Christians win a glorious victory; and held the battle-stead; with hymns and praises giving thanks to God. . . .

[Here follows the fight at Sandwich, from Asser, § 7.]

§ 4. In 853 (the fifth year of Alfred's age) . . . King Ethelwulf sent his son Alfred to Rome, and many a noble knight with him. And the blessed Pope Leo [the IVth] held the Apostolic See as at that time. He, then, hallowed the aforesaid child to King by anointing; and receiving him for his own child by adoption, gave

him Confirmation, and sent him back to his own land and to his father, with the blessing of St. Peter the Apostle. . . .[1]

[Here follows the fight in Thanet, from Asser, § 10.]

§ 5. In this year, too, did King Ethelwulf . . . give his daughter to Burghred, King of the Mercians. . . . Whereupon, being duly wed, gat she the place and name of Queen. . . .

§ 6. In 855 (the seventh year of the age of the King aforesaid), the heathen host wintered in the Island of Sheppey. And at that time did King Ethelwulf tithe the whole land, and freed the tenth part thereof from all royal service and tribute, and hallowed the same for ever, by deed of gift on the Cross of Christ, to God the Three in One, for the salvation of his soul and eke the souls of his forefathers. And in this year he went with great worship unto the Threshold of the Apostles, and with him he took his son Alfred, inasmuch as he loved him beyond all the rest. There did the Apostolic man greet him with all honour; and he stayed one whole year, diligently taken up with almsdeeds and with prayer. Yet at his home-coming was his son Ethelbald sore vexed, and it grieved him to the heart. Yea, and Ealhstan, Bishop of Sherborne, and many a man more.

§ 7. The most gracious King Ethelwulf lived two years after taking this journey to the Roman See. Amongst his other good deeds in this present life, he both took heed to his kingly duties and forethought as to his own departure; and, that his sons might not quarrel at his death, he wrote a writing (and full eloquently was it worded), wherein he set forth whatsoever by right pertained to each. He bade, for himself and all his successors, that throughout the whole of his land, among every ten dwellings [*mansis*], one poor person, either of inland folk or outland, should for ever be maintained with meat, drink, and clothing. Moreover, for the salvation of his soul, he likewise bade send unto Rome 300 mancuses:[2] 100 to the church of St. Peter, specially to buy oil to fill all the lamps of that church on Easter Eve, and eke at the Cock Crow; 100 for the honour of St. Paul; and 100 to the Universal Apostolic Pope.

§ 8. Thereafter, at the death of this glorious King Ethelwulf, did

[1] See p. 18.

[2] A marginal note in the MS. here tells us that a mancus was worth 30 pence, which is confirmed by the statute of Henry I., xxxv. 1. '20 manc. quæ facient 50s.' (= 600 pence). The word is of Saracen origin, being the participle of the Arabic verb *nakasha*, coin. A gold mancus weighed 66 grains.

his son Ethelbald, against the bode of Jesus Christ and all Christian teaching, yea, and against all heathen wont likewise, take in marriage, to his own great shame, Judith, the daughter of Charles, King of the Franks, his father's wife. And after his noble father's death, he ruled, without let, for two years and a half, the realm of the West Saxons.

§ 9. In the year 860 (the twelfth of the age of the illustrious Etheling Alfred), Ethelbald died, and was buried at Sherborne. The world being thus rid of him, his brother Ethelbyrht joined unto his kingdom Kent and Surrey and also Sussex, as was meet and right for to do. In his reign came there by sea a mighty heathen host, and stormed and spoiled the city of Winchester. But as the aforesaid host was wending back with no small booty, unto their ships, Osric, the most noble chieftain of the Hampshire men, came upon them with his folk. Also the far-famed Alderman Ethelwulf, with the men of Berkshire, met them bravely with no small muster. And when they joined battle, the heathen were everywhere hewn down by the Angles, through the aid of the Angels. And these deadly foes might no longer stand, by reason of their wounds; and there fell of them a very great multitude, and full shamefully withal. For some hid them in coverts of thick brambles, and some, like so many women, fled away. And the English had the luck that day; and theirs was the field.

§ 10. So then did King Ethelbyrht, for five years, bear rule over the land trusted unto him, in peace, and in mildness, and in all worship; and so went he the way of all flesh; and great grief was it to his nobles, and his bishops, and all his whole folk. So left he his earthly kingdom, and became partaker of a better. Beside his brother was he buried at Sherborne; where he waiteth the comfort of the resurrection to be. . . .

[Here follows the Danish treachery in Kent, from Asser, § 23.]

§ 11. In the year 866 (the 18th of Alfred's age), Ethelred, brother of Ethelbyrht, King of the West Saxons, took the helm of the Kingdom. In the same year a mighty fleet of heathen from Danube [*i.e.* Denmark] came in upon the parts of Britain; and so wintered in the realm of the eastern English, which is called in the Saxon tongue Eastengle. And there was this countless host horsed, and rode and trampled hither and thither, taking very much spoil, and sparing neither man nor woman, widow, nor maiden.

§ 12. In these days began Alfred the Etheling, through earnest painstaking, to be imbued with divine lore. From his very cradle was he loved with wondrous affection by his father and mother, beyond all his brethren. As he grew in stature, in the days of his youth, so showed he fairer in form than any one of them: bright was his face, so that all men marked it, and bright his talk. Like as the hart desireth the waterbrooks, so longed he that his inmost heart and mind should be fulfilled with sound learning. This noble boy, our destined King, strove also day and night to learn the Saxon songs. Full teachable was he, keen also to woodcraft, peerless in skill everyway. . . .

[Here follows the tale of Alfred and his mother, from Asser, § 27.]

§ 13. Afterwards, kindled by longing for the love of God, devoutly learnt he many psalms, and the Daily Course, that is, the celebration of the Hours; and having gathered these into one volume, he bare them ever in his bosom, both by night and day. O happy man! O wise King! Thou liftest that which lifteth thee; thou bearest the keys of knowledge; wisdom thou lovest, and wise shalt thou be; executing judgment and justice in the earth. . . .

§ 14. In 867 . . . the aforesaid host . . . came even unto York. . . . And, as then, had the Northumbrians driven out their rightful King, Osbert, and set over them a tyrant, one Ella. When therefore came in these Heathen that strife was stayed . . . and Osbert and Ella joined forces . . . and came unto York. Away fled the shipmen in a moment, and the Christians found themselves the better men. Then fought they, like madmen, with one another, and both these Kings fell. And they that were left made them peace with the Danes.

§ 15. In his twentieth year (A.D. 868), did the worshipful King Alfred, then holding rank as second ruler of the kingdom, take him a wife from Mercia, of noble kin, the daughter of Ethelred, Earl of the Gaini, who was called by the English 'Muckle,' through being great in stature and lofty in wisdom. This year was there a comet, most plain to behold.

§ 16. At that time, the aforesaid Heathen host left the Northumbrians and came, with all dreadfulness, to Nottingham, which in the British tongue is called Tigguocabauc, but in Latin *Speluncarum domus* [the House of Caves]. And there did these false guests abide that winter; and their coming was unpleasing enough to the landfolk, each and all. Then the mighty King of the Mercians,

Burghred by name, and all his nobles, hearing of their coming, took counsel with his thanes and warmen, and all the folk under him, how they might best, by strong hand, bring under their foes, or drive them from the kingdom. Then sent he messengers, with all speed, to Alfred, far-famed in fight, and to Ethelred his brother, beseeching that they would help him with brotherly aid; which thing they, like lions stout of heart, shrank not to do. For Alfred, thus stirred up, bade gather full hastily his host. For he bare in mind the saw:

'The rich man who's sure,
And bemoans, that he's poor,
Will ne'er be a doer.'

[*Nunquam dives agit*
Qui trepidus gemens
Sese credit egentem.]

A man, that is to say, however strong, can no way fulfil his wishes, if he be fearful and think himself poor, that is, in evil case. But by manfully striving may he carry out all his mind.

§ 17. His brother being fired with like zeal, they came unto Nottingham, ready to face the fray. And the Heathen, trusting to the walls of the fortress, offer battle, form their line, and draw out no small host. Yet feared they; for they saw the Christian folk, in their tens, their hundreds, and their thousands, standing firm against the foe, even as their devoted leaders would have them. And, at length, by the goodness of the Lord Almighty, the blasting of the breath of His displeasure ceased; the hearts of the wicked were brought low; they ask of the Christians truce and treaty. It was as if men besought the grace and mercy of Christ in this wise:

'Ruler of the wave storm-driven,
Let thy peace which reigns through Heaven
Likewise unto earth be given.'

[*Rapidos Rector comprime fluctus*
Et quo cœlum regis immensum
Firma stabiles fœdere terras.]

So peace was made between the Kings and the Heathen; and either went their way, even as sheep parted off from goats.

§ 18. In the year 869, the 21st of Alfred's age, the above-mentioned host went again to Northumbria. And there abode they a whole year, storming and raging, wasting and slaying, and that both men and women, without number.

§ 19. But in the following year, when the sunlight brightened the whole round of the world,[1] and the year 870 of our Lord's Incarnation had come, then shone forth the day wherein King Alfred fulfilled twenty-one years.

§ 20. A hideous horde of Danes—troops, so to speak, of legions—this year gathered them together, so that there seemed thousands on thousands by tale, as if they had grown from 1000 to twenty myriads. Thereafter came they through Mercia to East Anglia, and wintered at Thetford without fear. Then was King Edmund over all those realms . . . and well and manfully did he fight against that host . . . So died he a glorious death, . . . and entered, by the martyr's crown, into bliss eternal. . . .

§ 21. In the year 871, the twenty-second of the age of Alfred, the glorious King of the Saxons, that Heathen Host, of hateful memory, left the East Angles and invaded the kingdom of the West Saxons, coming to the town-royal named Reading, on the south bank of the Thames, in that district which is called by the country-folk Berkshire. On the third day of the coming in of these foes of the English, their earls, with a great band, swept the river-side, and harried many a mile. Some of them, moreover, were fain to raise a dyke between the rivers Thames and Kennet, but this purpose and work of the Danes was brought to nought; the English coming to the rescue.

§ 22. For while these raiders were at their mischief, and toiling therein like men, came there upon them Ethelwulf, chief of the land of Berkshire, a man keen in deed, girt in threefold mail, and his troops in hundreds with him [*cum suis agminibus centuriatus*]. Seeing, then, the multitude of the barbarians, this prince of the Christian folk spake unto them that followed him and said: 'Many is that host; yet fear you not thereof. Though in shield-wall against us it be the mightier, yet stronger still is our Captain, Christ.' Then did the Christians, trusting in the aid of Christ's dear Name, set on; and they met the Danes in a place called Englafield, where the aforesaid chieftain formed up his chosen troops, and bade them stand firm against the foe. And there was fought a hard-fought fight, and much folk on either side fell wounded, and much folk was there slain. Then fell one of the Danish princes, and of his men no small number, and the

[1] *I.e.* at the vernal equinox.

rest were full fain to flee. And the Christians won them the palm of victory, and held there the field.

§ 23. After this hap, twice two days later, did King Ethelred, in his might, and his brother Alfred, having raised their full muster, with royal power and valour, come to Reading; choosing either to live with honour in their realm, or, for Christ's sake, to fall in battle. And even as this valiant King, with his beloved brother, hewing down their foes, front and rear, had cut their way to the very gates of the stronghold, the Heathen, on their part, made a desperate rally, fighting like wolves; and there was a very grievous slaughter. And alas! sad to say, the foes of the English, on that day, won the field. And Ethelwulf of Berkshire, of late so lion-like in fight, there fell, with many another faithful soldier and servant of Jesus Christ.

§ 24. Roused by this woe and shame, the Angles besought them aid of the Angels, that they would bring them help, through the might of God. Then, after yet four days, they march their host against the aforesaid foemen, they gird on their arms, and take their post in the place called Escesdun; which may in sooth be rendered in the Latin tongue *Mons Fraxini* [Ash Down]. Thither did these chiefs of fame, so valiant in fight, go up with all their war-men, eager for the fray.

§ 25. The Danes eke, with no small war-craft, parted themselves into two bands, and made ready to quit them like men in battle. They also had two Kings, and many Chieftains, and like wary fighters, they gave one half of their host to the two Kings, and the other half to all the Chieftains together. Seeing this, the English likewise formed two divisions; and made themselves engines of war and the bulwarks thereof [*machinas et machinathoram propagnucla*].

§ 26. Then was King Alfred first ready; and set on with his troops. For full well did he know that the day would be won, not by the multitude of an host, but by the mercy and loving-kindness of our God. King Ethelred, the while, was in his tent, at his prayers; devoutly hearing Mass, and assisting at Divine Service. For full soothly did he say, once and again, that never would he leave till the priest had done all that Mass, nor, for any respect of man, turn away from the Service of God. And much did these Holy Mysteries profit the King and all the Christian folk; as will be shown in what here followeth.

§ 27. The Christian and English folk, then, minded, with devotion, bravely to meet in battle with their foes after this sort; that King Ethelred, the bravest of princes, should, with his myriads, match him against their legions; that is, one King of the English against the two Danish Kings; and that King Alfred, with his chiefs and war-men, captains and people, should try the hap of war against all the Chiefs of the Heathen. Thus had it seemed best, and thus was it most pleasing to both Kings alike, and eke to the people. Such were the counsels fore-ordained on either side.

§ 28. Now as King Ethelred tarried long in prayer, and the Heathen came full fast into the field, all ready for hard fighting, Alfred, though, as then, but second in command, could bear it no longer. Needs must he try either to break that foeman's line in battle, or to fall. With sudden start, sprang he up in his valour, and rushed on, brave as a wild-boar, charging the dense throng of Danes with the hallowed host of his English. Then came on also the King, sheathed in armour and in prayer, and, in the Name of the Great King of all the earth, dashed into the combat. Then took he also knowledge of the host of his brother, how skilfully it was handled, as though the warrior Judas [Maccabæus] had gone forth to battle. For trusting in the counsel of God, and aided by His strength, in good order had he drawn up his shield-wall,[1] and advanced his banners against the foe.

§ 29. Uneven was the chance: for the heathen had seized the higher ground, and the Christians were fain to charge upward from below. Yet manful and fair was the fight, on both sides alike, though the one were workers of wickedness, while the other fought for life and friends and fatherland; and in that field fell there one thousand one hundred and fifty men. And they that there died for their fatherland and their laws, were borne, as is meet to believe, to the land of endless bliss: but the others given over to him of whom it is said: '*He is the well-head of all unrighteousness.*' Yea, and the Kings, in good sooth, not only by word exhorted their folk to stand fast, but, in very warlike deed, themselves hewed down and brake the foe.

§ 30. And, in the end, did the Danes, when they saw their shield-wall and line pierced through and through, lose heart, grow shaken,

[1] *Testudine ordinabiliter condensata.* 'Shield-wall' was the regular Anglo-Saxon phrase for line of battle.

begin to quake, and, at the last, were stricken with mighty fear. For the panic was from God, and struck them to the heart; so that they might bear up no longer, and meet the onset of the English no more. To flight they took, and that ignobly, dropping their swords, owning themselves worsted, holding out their right hands, and beseeching quarter. And our Kings, stretching forth their swords, hardly so kept their warrior-folk back. Every way did that craven rabble flee, and all day long did our Englishmen hunt them down.

§ 31. On that day were many thousands cut to pieces, yea, over the whole breadth of the field of Ashdown; and the Kings, beholding that slaughter, gave great glory to God, Who had that day given unto them so triumphant a victory. There, moreover, fell King Bergsecg, and with him . . . Sidroc the chieftain, old in arms (of whom may be said the saw: *That ancient of ill days*). . . . Sidroc the younger, and Osbern, who led the host on, and Frena the chieftain, and Harold the chieftain, and all their men with them. Theirs was the broad and easy way; and down into the pit went they. *They knew not the way of knowledge, neither understood they the paths thereof: it was put far from their face* [Baruch iii. 20]. Thus ended this glorious battle; and the Kings, and all folk alike with them, were filled with joy unbounded, in that the Danes had fled and the English had there stood fast.

§ 32. Yet, after fourteen days, did the most excellent King Ethelred, forgetful that a year of jubilee should be one also of forgiveness, call up again his muster, with the trusty aid of his brother. . . . And again the English and Danes met in battle [at Basing]; and full stern was the fight and desperate. And almost, yea altogether, won the Danes that field. And, in that same year, King Ethelred, full of years and fulfilled of all good, passed into the bliss hereafter and the kingdom which hath no end, with the King of all worlds, in the Land of the Living.

§ 33. The aforesaid King being taken from this world, Alfred, his brother, was presently chosen by the Lords and Bishops of the whole land, and was besought, not by them only, but by the land-folk one and all, that he would reign over them, '*to be avenged of the heathen and to rebuke the people.*' So he gat him the rule over the whole nation, and ever was he foremost in valour, and ever victor in war, with fortune to friend, and Christ to comrade. Well skilled was he in Saxon song, ever zealous in God's service, and full

keenly did he look into the whole ministration of justice. Against him did the aforesaid host fight with fury, one month after his reign began, at the hill called Wilton; and finding how rough was the English hand-play, and how weak their own, turned their backs and fled away. But, alas! emboldened by the rashness of the pursuers, they turned them once again to fight, and won the victor's prize, and held the death-stead. And no wonder; for the Christians had but small force thereat. For they were worn out by eight battles in one year. And in this year did the Saxons make truce with those same Heathen, on troth that they should leave them.

§ 34. In the year 872, the twenty-fourth of Alfred's age, came the aforesaid Heathen host to London, and there wintered; and the Mercians made peace with them. And [the next year] leaving London, they marched to the land of the Northumbrians, and there wintered; and the Mercians yet again made peace with them. And [the next year] they wintered at Hripadun [Repton], and drave out Burghred, King of the Mercians, from his realm, and forced him off to Rome, in the twenty-second year of his reign. Nor, after reaching Rome, lived he long in this world, but departed to Him Who is the True Life, and was buried worshipfully in the church of the Holy and ever-Virgin Mary, Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, where he awaited His Second Advent, when of His bounty He will both dispense due rewards to the righteous and dreadful punishment to the wicked. The Danes moreover, after his driving-out, brought the Mercian realm under their own sway. To a certain plebeian warrior named Ceolwulf did they grant it, on this troth, that whensoever they would, they should have it again, without guile and without hurt.

§ 35. In the year 875, the twenty-sixth [27th] of Alfred's age, the aforesaid host left Repton and was parted into two bands. The one went with Halfdene to the land of the Northumbrians, and raided therein, and wintered near the river called Tyne, and brought that whole folk under their sway, and harried also the Picts and the Stretcludenses [Strathclyde]. (Then it was that Bishop Eardulf and Abbot Eadred, taking up the body of St. Cuthbert from Lindisfarne, wandered about with that treasure for nine years, fleeing from place to place before the face of the barbarians.) And the other part of the host went with Guthrum and Oscytel and Amund, Kings of the heathen, to the place called Grantabric

[Cambridge], and there wintered. As for King Alfred, he made him ready for sea-fighting, and met six ships upon the sea. Setting on them with good courage, he took one, and the rest in fear fled away. And Rollo, first Duke of the Normans, also called Rudbert [Robert] entered into Normandy on the xv. Kal. Dec.

§ 36. In 876 (the twenty-seventh [the 28th] year of Alfred's life) the aforesaid host stealing away by night from Cambridge made entry into the fortress named Wareham. And the Saxon King, forewarned of this sudden inroad, made truce with them, taking hostages, on troth-plight that they should depart the kingdom. But they, after their wont, regarding neither hostage nor oath, one night brake their troth, and made a flank march to Exeter, which is called in British *Cairwisc*, in Latin *Civitas Aquarum*.

§ 37. In the year 877, the twenty-seventh [29th] of Alfred's age, that shameless host left Exeter, and went to the town royal of Chippenham, and there wintered. And now did King Alfred undergo many a suffering, and a weary life led he. At length, emboldened by St. Cuthbert . . . he won the victory; and ever after was feared and unconquered by his foes. . . . How he overcame them is now to be recorded.

§ 38. In that same year the Kings Inguar and Halfdene, with 23 ships, pouring out, like fierce wolves, from the land of Demetia [South Wales] (where they had wintered, with much slaughter of Christians and burning of minsters), sailed over to Devon. And there were they slain, both of them, and 1200 men with them, by the brave thanes of King Alfred, before the fortress of Cynwith. . . And King Alfred, trusting in the Lord God, wrought him a stronghold, along with a few troops, at a place called Athelney. This held he with his men, and often and tirelessly vexed they the foe from this stronghold. This he did at the season of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. And seven weeks and one day (that is, 50 days), after, came he unto Egbert's Stone, on the east border of the forest called in the English tongue *Mucel Wudu*, in Latin *Silva Magna*, and in British *Coitmaur*. There did all the folk of Somerset, and Wiltshire, and Hampshire, meet their dear-loved King. And, at sight of him, they rejoiced with joy of heart untold, as for one raised from the dead.

§ 39. So came he, the third day after, with a mighty host, to the place called Ethandun [Edington]; whereat, hard by, he

found no less mighty forces of the Heathen, drawn up in one dense mass for battle. With the first bright rays of the rising sun did the King alike and all the flower of his flock beclothe themselves in their war-gear, with the threefold breastplate, to wit, of Faith, and of Hope, and of the Love of God. Arising thereafter from the ground, boldly did they challenge the combat, trusting full surely in the Mercy and Lovingkindness of the Creator, and safe-guarded, as with a rampart, by the presence of their King, whose face shone even then with light, as it had been the face of an angel.

§ 40. All the long day did the two nations fight; and far off might you hear the shouting and the crash of arms. And He Who in His Might beholdeth all things, beheld also the inmost wish of His King on earth, and granted him his heart's desire, the prayers and the aid of the Powers of Heaven. Thus at length laid he low his foes, and gat him the victory, giving thanks to his Heavenly Saviour with joy of heart.

§ 41. Then did the King and his hosts stand by, all smiling with joy of heart. But the remnant of the foe cried ever aloud, for sorrow of heart, and for bitter hunger, and for cold, and for mighty dread. Mercy do they implore, mercy, mercy and peace—they who had ever been enemies unto peace, of direst mood. Sureties they proffer; troth-plight would they swear. Then, at hearing all this with his outward ears, the King was moved with compassion inwardly in his heart, and he granted all their prayer.

§ 42. Also their King, Guthrum by name, avowed that he would fain become a Christian, and, under the hand of our most religious and gracious King, was he taken to the cleansing of Baptism, in kingly wise. For the King of the Saxons himself took this Guthrum for his own son by adoption, at his washing in the laver of Salvation, And thirty other, chosen men, were also with him. After he was baptized he stayed for twelve nights with his spiritual father right worshipfully; and he, for his part, bestowed on him, and on all them who received the Christian faith, gifts great and manifold.

§ 43. In the year 879 (the twenty-eight [31st] of King Alfred's age), the aforesaid Heathen host brake up, according to their troth, from Chippenham, and went to Cirencester (which is in the British tongue Cairceri); and there stayed they one whole year. Also, in that year, came a mighty host of heathen from over-seas

into the river Thames, and, joining them with the aforesaid body, they banded together, as is the wont of the wicked. And that same year was there an eclipse, between Nones and Vespers.

§ 44. In 880 (the twenty-ninth [32nd] of Alfred's age), the oft-mentioned Heathen host left Cirencester, and went to the East Angles, and, sharing amongst them that land, there took up their abode. The heathen who had wintered at Fulham forsook Britain, and went on to pay France a visit; and a grievous visitation was it. . . .

[Here follow their doings abroad, from Asser, § 67.]

§ 45. In 882, the thirty-first [34th] of the age of the Glorious Alfred . . . that best of captains girt him for sea-fight, and met the Heathen fleet upon the wave. And he, at sea victorious as on land, won, with stout courage, two from out their ships, and all on board were slaughtered to a man. And for this victory did that high Prince render due thanks unto His Name Who gives Salvation. Now the next hap must we tell. Thereafter of two ships he wounded sore the captains, and their shipmates, one and all; who, laying down their arms, in helpless wise, with many a bended knee and suppliant prayer, gave themselves up to our great King, so long as any spark of life should burn in them.[1] . . .

Cuthbert, from a slave, was made King [of Bernicia]; and at Cunkeceastre [Chester-le-Street] was the Bishopric once more set up.[2]

§ 46. In 884 (the thirty-third [36th] of the age of the most illustrious King Alfred), that host, whereof the very name is loathsome, parted itself into two bands. The one went into East France;[3] the other . . . to the place called Rochester in Kent. Before the gate thereof did the Heathen throw up an earth-work. Yet could they not take the city; for the townsmen bravely withstood them, until King Alfred, the shield of the whole realm, came upon them with no small force. And even as he drew near with all speed, so quickly did the Danes, fear-stricken, seek safety on shipboard; leaving their earthwork, and all the horses brought with them from France, and all the French captives they had taken.

1 This seems to be from ballad, and falls almost spontaneously into rhythm.

2 See Roger of Wendover, § 13.

3 The country of the East Franks, between the Rhine and the Elbe.

§ 47. And at that time, in the same year, did this hero King send his fleet, all full of warmen, from Kent to the East Angles. And when they drew nigh unto the mouth of the river Stour, suddenly there met them 13 Heathen ships, all ready for battle. Fierce was the fight on both sides, and the Heathen were wholly beaten, and all their ships taken, and all the treasure therein. Nevertheless, such of the Danes as could make good their flight, gathered ships, as best they might, on all hands, and came down in fighting trim upon the English, who were now sunk in slumber. So, unready and unarmed, they were slain in crowds; and well may we say of such the old saw: '*Who should look out, full fast shuts oft his eye. . . .*'

[Here follow the foreign events of Asser, § 71.]

§ 48. At that time, Pope Marinus, of most sacred memory, went the way of all flesh, yielding up his soul to Him that gave it. He freed the Saxon School, in the city of Rome, from all tribute, out of loving regard to the most gracious King Alfred. Also he sent him many gifts; amongst which he gave him a fragment of the most blessed Cross, whereon our Lord Jesus Christ hung for the salvation of all mankind.

§ 49. There were born unto the King both sons and daughters, and fair enough they were, and lovely to behold. Here be their names emblazoned [*deflorata*]:

Eadward Æthelward
Æthelfled Æthelgifu Ealfthrid.

The King's son Eadward and his sister Ealfthrid [Elfrida] were always brought up in the King's court, and great care, and teachers had they, both of men and women; yea, and they learnt by heart many a psalm, and many a Saxon book, and many a lay. Ethelward, the younger brother, was ever, in letters and exercises, the first amongst the sons of warriors, whether nobles or commoners. Ethelfled, their sister, was joined in wedlock to Eadred [Ethelred], Prince of the Mercians. Their sister Ethelgifu [Elgiva] was set under rule in monastic life.

§ 50. At this time Archbishop Plegmund, so faithful and so famous, ruled the Church of Christ; a reverend man, bright with the fruits of Wisdom, built up on Four Pillars, namely, Justice, Prudence, Temperance, and Fortitude. At the same time the throne of the little See of Worcester was honoured by the rule of

Warfrid, with his deep devotion and his power of mind. He it was who, by the command and urgent wish of the King, turned Gregory's Book of Dialogues into the Saxon tongue; oftentimes most elegantly giving sense for sense. And the King also bade the famous priests, Athelstan and Werwulf, to come to him from Mercia, seeing they were more soothly and fully skilled in the knowledge of Divine Law. Such as these did he specially love and worship, and by their teaching and learning was this Pacific King glorified above all the Kings of the earth.

§ 51. In the year 886 (the thirty-fifth [38th] of the age of Alfred the Glorious) the unspeakable Danish host . . . came to the city of Paris, and wintered thereby, and cut down the bridge, that the townsfolk might not pass thereon. Nevertheless, God granting His very present help, and the townsfolk themselves withstanding them bravely, they could not break through the walls of the city.[1]

§ 52. And at that same time the King of the English right royally restored the great city of London, that men might once more dwell therein, after the many burnings of the town and the many massacres of the townsfolk; and he gave it over to the ward of Ethelred, the Chief of the Mercians. And all, both Angles and Saxons, who erstwhile had been everywhere scattered amongst the Heathen, so many as were freed from bondage, bent to him as their Lord. And he, of his own gracious mood, gave unto all his fatherly good will. . . .

[Here follow the foreign events of Asser, § 103.]

§ 53. Many were his tribulations and afflictions in this world; but firm stood his kingly power. . . . How he widened the bounds of his kingdom, how he built up the walls of cities, how he made strong the ramparts of fortresses broken down, how he set them up where of old were none,—who is of wit to declare it all? What lips can praise it, what tongue tell it out? Yea, moreover, and how he enriched holy places with royal gifts and adornments? Full oft was he vexed at the heart with the princes, and the captains [*pentecontarchos*] and the whole perverse generation, because they would not follow after him in the purposes on which he was bent. Yet, all alone, strove he, by the help of God Almighty, like a skilful steersman, so to sway the helm, as to bring

1 It was at this siege that Paris was saved by the devoted courage of the peasant maiden, St. Geneviève.

his ship—his own glorious and living soul—into the harbour and the calm and the peace of Paradise. Often and often was he wont to repeat to himself by heart these lines:

'Whoso would ever
In quiet sit fast,
Bent by no buffet
Of blustering blast.'

and what followeth.[1]

'Though ruin on ruin
Be heaped through the world,
Though on by the wild wind
The billows be hurled,
Thou, stablished in quiet,
Thou, happy and strong,
Shalt smile at the tempest
Through all thy life long.'[2]

§ 54. The same King founded a very fair monastery in the place called Athelney: and hard by, on its western bound, a very strong fortress was set up by the command and means of the said King. In this community he gathered from all quarters monks of divers race, and set them down therein. Another monastery founded he hard by the east gate of the city called Shaftesbury, well suited for the abode of holy women [*sanctimonialium*], wherein he placed as Abbess his daughter Elgiva, a maiden dedicated to God. To both monasteries he granted such store of gifts and possessions as should suffice them for food and clothing all their life long.

[1] *Et infra.* As the first quotation does not complete a sentence, these words probably are equivalent to our, 'etc.'

[2] This is one of the metres of Boethius:

'Quisquis volet perennem
Cautus ponere sedem
Stabilisque, nec sonori
Sterni flatibus Euri'

* * * *

'Quum tenet ruinis
Hujus sæculi status
Miscens æquora ventus,
Tu, conditus quieti,
Felix robore valli,
Duces serenus ævum,
Ridens ætheris iras.'

Alfred translates this poem in his Boethius, but so vaguely that it is difficult to say which of his lines correspond to these.

§ 55. These things which we have told being firmly and wholly fulfilled, the far-famed King Alfred, after his wont, began to turn over in his secret heart [*mentis thalamum*] that which is written in the Divine Scriptures: '*If (saith he) thou rightly offerest, and unrightly dividest, thou hast sinned.*'[1] Also thoroughly did he lay to heart and dwelt upon that which Solomon, the wisest of kings, saith, '*Surely the heart of the King is in the hand of the Almighty*' [Prov. xxi. 1].

§ 56. Turning over these things in himself with inward searching of heart, this heavenly minded monarch brought forth plenteously the fruit of good works, for a sweet-smelling savour. At the holy solemnities of the Festivals, what boons he bestowed on his bishops and chieftains and knights, none may declare. Then did the poor leap for gladness, then were widows and orphans full of joy; and heartfelt praises they gave him. Full well he knew that saying of the Teacher [*Scolastici*]—'*Then is money of true worth, when it has been handed over to others. Almsgiving is the end of ownership.*'[2] Finally he took upon him not only to admonish his bishops, bright as they were with heavenly radiance, that they should correct the faults of the people, and chide and check all vulgar foolishness. Not only, I say, did he admonish the pastors of his people: but his princes, eke, and his most beloved servants, did he teach that with all their wit should they ever set forward the common weal of the whole realm.

§ 57. His revenue parted he into three shares, after this sort. The first share of his income gave he, year by year, to his warriors; the second to the workmen, whom he had gathered from many nations; the third to the strangers who from all parts came unto him: knowing full well that '*God loveth a cheerful giver.*' Truly, however, was he set among the thorns of many and manifold troubles; howbeit enthroned, under God, in royal power. . . .

[Here follow the events of the years 888 onwards, abbreviated from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.]

§ 58. In the year 899, Alfred, King of the West Saxons, son of the most pious King Ethelwulf, having completed 29 years and six months of his reign, died on the 5th of the Kalends of November

1 See Asser, § 129.

2 'Tunc est preciosa pecunia cum translata fuerit in alios. Largiendi usu desinit possideri.'

[October 28] in the 4th Indiction; and at Winton [Winchester), in the New Monastery, was he buried.

And in his stead reigned his son Edward, surnamed the Elder; in letters and in culture below his father, but in honour and in power and in glory no less above him.

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§ 59. In the days of this King Alfred there came to England John Scot, a man clear of head and ready of speech. He had some time before left his own land and gone over to France, to Charles the Bald. . . . He was a man of no little humour and free-witted withal, of which examples are to this day on record. For instance, he was one day sitting at meat over against the King, on the other side of the table. The cups were going round, and the dishes removed. Then Charles, with a gay face, when, after some other talk, he spied John doing something offensive to French politeness, courteously chid him, saying 'Come, what is there now, between a sot and a Scot?' Gravely did he return the joke upon its author and answered, 'This table only.' What could be wittier? . . .

§ 60. At the request of Charles he turned the Hierarchia of Dionysius the Areopagite from Greek into Latin, word for word; whence it comes to pass that the Latin can scarce be understood, seeing that it is construed rather with Greek volubility than with our order.[1] He also composed a book which he entitled 'Periphysion Merismou [περὶ φύσεων μερισμοῦ], that is, *Of the Division of Nature*, useful enough for solving the difficulty of certain questions, if only he be pardoned in some points, wherein he has swerved from the Latin track, by too keen an eye for the Greek. Wherefore he was thought a heretic, and . . . Pope Nicholas is known to have shared this view. For in a letter to Charles he says: 'It has been reported to Our Apostleship, that one of your friends, John, a Scot by birth, has lately translated into Latin a work of the Blessed Dionysius the Areopagite, which he wrote in Greek, concerning the Divine Titles [*Nomina*] or Celestial Orders. Which work ought, according to custom, to be sent to Us, and to be approved by Our judgment; more especially as this

1 'Volubilitate magis Græca quam positione construitur nostra.'

same John, though declared to be a man of much learning, is said, by common report, to have at one time held unsound opinions on certain points.'

§ 61. Through this evil report he wearied of France, and came to King Alfred. And attracted by his munificence, and at his appointment, as is known by the King's writ, he settled at Meldun [Malmesbury]. There, after some years, he lost his life, pierced by the steel pens of the boys whom he taught; a most cruel death. . . . Long lay he in an unhonoured grave in the Church of St. Lawrence, which had witnessed his hideous murder. But the favour of God for many nights shed over him a light of fire, and the monks, at this warning, translated him into their larger church, and laid him on the left-side of the altar.

Note A.

This tale of John Scotus is found in the second redaction of Simeon's History, under the year 884. I suspect it, however, to be an insertion by some later hand. The story of the murder is particularly suspicious, identical as it is with that of the martyrdom of the tutor of St. Pancras, in the Diocletian persecution. At that date steel pens were actually in use (for writing on wax tablets), but this method was unknown in Alfred's day.

Note B (p. 186).

The Indiction.

This was a fifteen-year Cycle, said to have been ordained by Constantine. beginning probably with A.D. 313, the date of his establishment as Emperor, Calculations by this method are, however, very uncertain, as not only are the claims of both 312 and 314 to be the opening year advocated by sundry authorities, but further confusion is introduced by the Roman Indiction beginning December 25 or January 1, while that used in England and France began September 24.

V.

WILLIAM OF MALMESBURY.

DEEDS OF THE ENGLISH KINGS.

THIS great historian, the librarian and precentor of the Abbey of Malmesbury, wrote early in the twelfth century. Many MSS. of his works exist, four at least being of his own day. The standard edition is that of Mr. Duffus Hardy (1840), and translations have been made by Mr. Sharpe (1815) and in 'The Church Historians of England' (1854).

The sections of his 'Deeds of the Kings' (which, for our period, is founded on Asser, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and the Chronicle of St. Neot's) here translated are:

SECTION.
108. Of King Ethelwulf and his Bishops.
109. Of his going to Rome, and of his marriage.
113. Of Ethelbald his son.
115. Of his pedigree.

SECTION.
119. Of the fight at Ashdown.
121. Of Alfred in war.
122. Of Alfred in peace, of his Laws, of his 'Hundreds,' of his Indian Mission.
123. Of his writings.

WILLIAM OF MALMESBURY.

§ 108. In A.D. 837 Ethelwulf (whom some call Athulf), son of Egbert, came to the throne, and reigned twenty years and five months. Mild of mood was he, and far fainer to live in quiet than to bear wide sway; thus, in the end, he was content with Wessex, his father's own realm, and gave over all else he [Egbert] had won to his son Athelstan; of whom we know not when or how he died. He aided Burghred, King of the Mercians, against the Britons;—yea, and honoured him with his daughter's hand in wedlock. Full oft did he and his chieftains worst the piratic Danes, who were overrunning the land and vexing the coast with sudden raids; though, as the fortune of war is, he too underwent many a disaster, London being laid waste and almost all Kent likewise. Yet were these inroads ever checked by the King's counsellors, who suffered not the foe to raid unpunished, but, by their common counsel, wreaked on them full vengeance. For the King, as at that time, had two most excellent bishops, the Blessed Swithun[1] of Winchester and Alstan of Sherborne. These two, seeing the King to be a dullard born and thick-headed [*crassioris et hebetis ingenii*], stirred him up by many an oft-repeated monition to learn his king-craft. Swithun, who loved not the world neither the things of the world, ever warned him to seek those things that be above. Alstan, knowing that the earthly weal of the realm must not be neglected, ever cheered him against the Danes, himself finding money for the cost, and training the army.

§ 109. Trusting, then, in these two . . . Ethelwulf, having first got the better of his foes, turned him next to the setting up of God's worship, and granted the tenth of every hide of land in his realm to the ministers of Christ, free from all tribute and custom. He went also to Rome, and there offered to St. Peter that tribute that England payeth even to this day, before Pope Leo IV., who had also, erewhile, received with honour, and anointed King, Alfred his son, whom Ethelwulf had sent to him. Abiding there one whole year, he worshipfully repaired the English School,

1 St. Swithun had been Ethelwulf's tutor in boyhood, and is traditionally said to have been Alfred's also. He became Bishop of Winchester 838, in succession, as some authorities tell, to Ethelwulf himself, and died 862.

which, as men say, was first founded by Offa, King of the Mercians, and burnt down some time back. Coming home through France, he wedded Judith, daughter of Charles, King of the Franks. . . .

[Here follow details as to the ancestors of this King, and a long account of a vision wherein he saw their sufferings in Purgatory. This is from the Chronicle of St. Neot's.]

§ 113. On his return . . . Ethelbald his son, and Alstan, Bishop of Sherborne, conspired against him, and would fain have cast him from the kingship. Howbeit less hasty rede was taken, and the kingdom was shared between father and son. Unjustly too was it shared, for their malice so far prevailed that the western half, which was the better, went to the son, while the eastern, and worse, fell to the father. He, however, with forbearance beyond belief, and dreading 'a worse than civil war,' peacefully gave way to his son, yea, and kept back, by mild speech, the folk who were gathered to stand up for his right. And though all this quarrel arose through his outland wife, yet held he her ever highly, and was fain to set her on the throne beside him, against West Saxon wont. . . .

[Here follows the story of Edburga (Asser, §§ 17, 18).]

* * * * *

He bade that, till the end of time, one poor man should be clothed and fed from every hide of his inheritance, and that year by year there should be sent to Rome 300 mancas of gold, whereof 100 should be for St. Peter, 100 to St. Paul, for lamps, and 100 to the Pope, for alms-giving. Two years after he came back from Rome he died, and was buried at Winchester in the cathedral.

* * * * *

§ 115. From this King the English Chronicles trace the line of their Kings even up to Adam (as we know that Luke the Evangelist has done for our Lord Jesus Christ). And perhaps it may not be too much, if I do it; though I fear the sound of barbarous names may shock unaccustomed ears. . . .

The pedigree of Ethelwulf is accordingly traced through twelve generations to 'Cherdic, first King of the West Saxons.' Nine more bring us to the Teutonic deity Woden,' 'from whom came the Kings of many nations'; and yet another nine to 'Sceaf, who, as some say, was driven on to a certain island in Germany called Scanza [Scandinavia], of which Jornandes, the historian of the Goths, telleth,—a little boy, all alone in a skiff, and at his head a sheaf of corn (whence he was named Sceaf). At this strange sight, the landsfolk there

made him welcome, and gave him good up-bringing. And, in riper years, he reigned in Sleswick, which is now called Haitheby. That land, the old Anglia, whence the English came into Britain, lieth between the Saxons and the Goths.' This personage was great-great-grandson to 'Streph, the son of Noah, born in the Ark.'

The incest, reign, and death of Ethelbald are given as in Asser, followed by a panegyric on his successor Ethelred, and the nine battles of 871 (Asser, § § 21-24, 33-36).

* * * * *

§ 119. One fight, memorable beyond all, was at Ashdown [*Escendun*]. There gathered the Danes; . . . and Ethelred with his brother Alfred came upon them. With earliest dawn was Alfred at his post; but his brother abode yet in his tent, fixed in prayer. Nay, when tidings came that the Heathen were even now making their wild onset, 'not one step,' said he, 'will I stir till the service is ended.' And greatly did this piety profit his brother, who, with the overboldness of youth, was already far forward in the field. For the English ranks were all but giving way, and nigh unto flight, inasmuch as the enemy charged down upon them from higher ground, when the King, with the Cross of God for his banner, struck in, and scattered the foe. . . .

[Here follows the Danish conquest of East Anglia, Mercia and Northumbria, and the death of Ethelred (Asser, § 46).]

* * * * *

§ 121. In the year of our Lord's Incarnation 872, Alfred, the youngest son of Ethelwulf, who had before received from Pope Leo IV. at Rome the kingly unction and crown, came unto the throne, and held it, with mighty toil and mightier valour, for 28 and a half years. To follow up the mazy labyrinth of his labours purposed I never, for to trace out all his deeds in their exact order would but confuse my readers. To tell how the foeman's host, driven by him and his chiefs from one part, went off to another, and when dislodged thence, sought some fresh spot, filling every place with rapine and slaughter, and to follow him, so to speak, round the whole island, would it seemeth me, be the height of folly. Therefore I shall but touch on it all summarily.

For nine years on end fought he on . . . and, at last, was brought to such utter distress . . . that he must needs hide away in a certain island called Athelney [*Adelingia*] . . . . Afterwards, in happier times, was he wont to tell, in lively and pleasant wise, of his perils there, and how, by the merits of St. Cuthbert, he escaped.

For it mostly happens that men recollect with gladness that case which once they most dreaded. . . .

[Here follows the story told on p. 33, and that of Alfred's visit to the Danish camp disguised as a minstrel. The decisive defeat of the invaders is next told, and the division of England between Alfred and Guthrum, traces of which were still evident in the days of our author. East Anglia and Northumbria, he tells us, though brought again beneath the English sway, 'reluctantly admit one common King of England, as we see at this very day.' When he wrote, the rising of the North against the Conqueror, and the long resistance of Ely, were still fresh in men's minds. After this we read of the Danish doings on the Continent, and their return to England in 893 (from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle).]

* * * * *

After England for 14 years had enjoyed peace and quiet . . . then came back that pest of Northern barbarians, and war and slaughter with them. Plots, too, there arose among the Northumbrians and amongst the East Anglians. But neither did the outlanders nor the landsfolk meet the same hap as in bygone years. The first, weakened by their fights beyond sea, were less ready in their raiding, and the last, now well taught in war-craft . . . were more forward to withstand them, yea, and to attack them also. The King himself, ready as ever, was everywhere in every need; daunting the invaders, and encouraging his own folk by his well-seen boldness and valour. All alone would he throw himself upon the foe; yea, with his own right hand and his own arm would he rally his forces when they gave way. To this day do the land-folk show the very spots where his luck was worst, and fortune least his friend. But with Alfred one must needs fight even after he was down; so that, when he might be thought wholly overthrown,

'*Yet like a slippery snake, would he 'scape from the hand-grip that held him,*'

glide from his lurking-den, and, boldly as ever, spring on the mocking foe. When he had been put to flight, then was he the most to be dreaded; for defeat did but teach him caution, and make him the bolder to seek vengeance. . . .

[Alfred's children are here enumerated, and his ill-health touched upon.]

* * * * *

§ 122. Yet, after all, it is his less conspicuous life that is worthy of the greatest praise and wonder. For though, as men say, '*Inter arma silent leges*,' yet did he, amid the din of war, draw up a Law-code whereby his folk might at once be well-taught both in worship and in war-craft. And since, from the example of the

barbarians, the land-folk themselves began to lust after rapine, insomuch that without a guard no man might safely travel, he fixed Centuries, which they call *Hundreds*, and Decennaries, which they call *Tythings*, so that every Englishman must, by law, belong to both. If any were charged with a crime, he must at once find folk from his Hundred and Tything to become surety for him; and whosoever might not find such surety, on him the law was hard. If any, when charged, fled him away (either before or after finding surety), his whole Hundred and Tything paid forfeit to the King. . . .

Many gifts sent he over sea to Rome, and even to St. Thomas in India. Sigelin, Bishop of Sherborne, was sent on that errand, and reached India with all prosperity, at which men marvel even unto this day. When he came back, he brought with him many a strange and brilliant jewel, and of the aromatic juice [? sugar] wherein that land aboundeth. He brought back, too, a gift, more precious than any gold—a bit of the Saviour's Cross, sent by Pope Marinus to the King. . . .

[Here followed the list of Alfred's monasteries, and the roll of his literary friends, Grimbald, Asser, John Erigena, etc.]

* * * * *

§ 123. With these helpers, the King gave his whole soul to Culture and to the Liberal Arts. Never was Englishman quicker in understanding or more elegant in translating. . . . Much did he turn into English out of Roman authors, thus bearing away for the good of his own folk the very choicest spoils of other lands. His chief publications were: Orosius, Gregory's Pastoral Care, Bede's History of the Angles, Boethius on the Consolation of Philosophy, and his own book, which he called in the vernacular, Hand-Book. . . . When he died he had just begun a translation of the Psalter. . . .

[Here Alfred's lantern is referred to, and his system of almsgiving (from Asser.)]

* * * * *

He had one unheard of custom; that he ever bare in his bosom a book wherein were set down the Daily Psalms,[1] in due order, that he might carefully recite them, if ever leisure served him.

1 According to the Breviary, the entire Psalter is recited weekly, and several Psalms (including the 118th [119th]) daily.

In this way he passed his life, revered by all . . . and when he paid the debt of nature was buried at Winchester, in the Abbey which he there founded.

[Here, in the best MSS., follows the magnificent encomium upon Alfred, also found in Florence of Worcester.]

VI.

HENRY OF HUNTINGDON.

'HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH.'

THIS writer was Archdeacon of Huntingdon in the early part of the twelfth century. His 'History of the English' begins with Julius Cæsar, and ends 1154. He is one of the most spirited of our writers, and though his entries for Alfred's reign are almost all from Asser, yet every here and there he inserts some interesting little bit of independent information, and gives his own colour to many of the incidents he records. These variations from his authority will be found in the following extracts :

CONTENTS.

SECTION.	
1. Of the Danish inroads.	11. Of St. Edmund.
4. Of the fight at Ockley.	12. Of the Danes in Wessex.
7. Of King Ethelbald.	15. Of the Vikings in Stourmouth.
8. Of King Ethelbert.	16. How Alfred built again London.
9. Of Ingwar and Hubba.	17. How Alfred died

HENRY OF HUNTINGDON.

BOOK V.

§ 1. In the beginning of this work I said that with a five-fold scourge had Britain been chastised. And of the fourth that, to wit, wielded by the Danes, I now set me to tell in this Book. For this chastisement indeed was both longer and far harder than the rest.

§ 2. For the Romans in brief space brought Britain beneath their sway, and right well did they rule their conquest. The Picts and Scots, again, often indeed harried the North, but their raids went not beyond those parts, nor ever did any very grievous harm. The Saxons, in turn, as they grew in strength, so, little by little, gat hold of the land by force of arms, and settled therein, and made them laws and statutes. As for the Normans, suddenly and quickly conquered they this island, and granted unto the conquered life and liberty, with all just rights, and the old laws of the realm.

§ 3. But the Danes by inroad after inroad overran the land: not to settle came they, but to spoil, to harry rather than to cŏnquer. And if anywhere they were worsted it was of no avail, for then would they raid some other spot, with a larger fleet and a stronger force. Wonder was it how when the English Kings were hasting to meet them in the East, ere they could come up with their bands a breathless scout would run in, saying, 'Sir King, whither marchest thou? The heathen have landed in the South, a countless fleet. Towns and hamlets are in flames, fire and slaughter are on every side.' Yea, and that very day another would çome running: 'Sir King, why withdrawest thou? A fearsome host has come to shore in the West. If ye face them not speedily, they will hold that ye flee, and will be on your rear with fire and sword.' Again on the morrow would dash up yet another, saying: 'What place make ye for, noble chieftains? In the North have the Danes made a raid. Already have they burnt your dwellings. Even now are they sweeping off your goods; tossing your babes on their spear-points, dishonouring your wives, and haling them to captivity.' Bewildered by such tidings of bitter woe, both Kings and people lost heart and strength both of mind and body, and were utterly cast down. . . .

[Henry goes on to ascribe these calamities to the general irreligion of the country 'where nothing was held shameful save piety, where the surest road to ruin was by innocence. Therefore did the Almighty loose upon them the most barbarous of all folk, the Danes, to wit, and Goths, Norsemen and Swedes, Vandals and Frisians. Like swarms of wasps they came, sparing neither age nor sex, and wasted the land 230 years, even unto the coming in of the Normans.']

* * * * *

§ 4. Ethelwulf in the 16th year of his reign, and Ethelbald his son, gathered all their force, and fought against a mighty Host; which, with 350 ships, had put in at Thames-mouth, and brake down those far-famed cities, of age-long renown, London, to wit, and Canterbury, and worsted and put to flight Bertwulf, King of Mercia, who never throve after. Then, going on into Surrey, met they, at Ockley, the King's force; and between those two great armies befell there the sternest fight ever known in England. On either side the warriors fell like corn in harvest; blood flowed in torrents, sweeping along full many a head and many a limb. Tedious were it to tell all in full. God gave the victory to His faithful, and shame and disaster to them that despised Him.

§ 5. Thus was King Ethelwulf a glorious victor. An Alderman also, named Ceori, with the men of Devon fought the Heathen at Wembury [near Plymouth], and slew many, and won the field. This year then was lucky for the English folk: but it was the first wherein the Heathen Host wintered in the land. . . .

[Here follows Asser, §§ 8-12, slightly abbreviated.]

* * * * *

§ 6. Ethelwulf was removed from among men [A.D. 858], and buried at Winchester, where indeed he had of old been Bishop, but on the death of Egbert his father, must needs be made King, and having married a wife, begat four sons, who were all Kings after him.

§ 7. To his son Ethelbald left he the heritage of the kingdom of Wessex, and to Ethelbert left he Kent, Surrey, and Suseex. Thus did these brothers, youths alike right-minded, rule in peace, each his own land, while both lived. And when Ethelbald, King of Wessex, had held his kingdom in peace five years, he was cut off by an early death. Then did all England bewail the youth, and

great woe was made for him. At Sherborne buried they him, and the English felt how much they had lost in him.

§ 8. Then did Ethelbert, his brother, follow him in the kingdom of Wessex, who was before King of Kent. In his days came over a great fleet, and the crews thereof stormed Winchester. Then came it to pass:

'Falls that old city, queen so many a year.'

[*Urbs antiqua ruit, multos dominata per annos.*—Virgil, 'Æn., ii. 363.]

Then fought Osric the Alderman [*dux*], with Hampshire, and Ethelwulf the Alderman, with Berkshire, against that host; and there put we them to flight with great slaughter, and won that day the field. . . .

[Here follows the Danish harrying of Kent (Asser, § 23).]

* * * * *

§ 9. Ethelbert this year [866] tasted death. Five years reigned he over Wessex, and over Kent reigned he ten years. And Etheldred his brother reigned in his stead.

That same year came there to land in England a mighty host of Heathen. And their Chieftains who led them were Ingwar and Hubba, valiant men, but all too cruel. Ingwar stood first in craft, Hubba in valour. Among the East Angles did they winter, and made peace with them, and took horses from that folk, and (for that they were all quiet and adread) spared them for that while. . . .

[Here follows a short account of the Danish victory at York (Asser, §§ 30, 31.)]

* * * * *

§ 10. In the third year of his reign [868] went King Ethelred, with Alfred his brother, unto Nottingham, to the aid of Burghred, King of Mercia. For the Danish host had marched to Nottingham, and there wintered. Ingwar then, seeing that the whole force of England was there gathered, and that his host was the weaker, and was there shut in, betook him to smooth words—cunning fox that he was—and won peace and troth from the English. Then went he back to York, and abode there one year, with all cruelty.

§ 11. In the year of our Lord 870, which was the fifth of King Ethelred, was St. Edmund taken up into Heaven. For the aforesaid Host under King Ingwar, came through Mercia unto Thetford, and there wintered, and wrought upon that wretched folk utter ruin. And Edmund, being King, was liefer to die than to see such woe of

his folk, whereupon he was taken by the unbelievers, and his sacred body made fast to a tree, and pierced all over through and through by their arrows. But by many a miracle has God's mercy glorified it.

§ 12. In the sixth year of King Ethelred came there a new and numberless Host, rushing on like a torrent and sweeping all before it, even unto Reading. So many they were that they might not march in one body, but in sundry bands, and by divers ways. . . .

[Here follows a shortened account of the campaign of 871 and the following events (Asser, §§ 36-51).]

* * * * *

§ 13. In the seventh year of King Alfred [878] did the Danes hold all the whole land, from Thames northward. In Northumbria reigned King Halfdene, and in East Anglia his brother, and in Mercia those three other Kings [Guthrum, Oscytel, and Anwynd]; and Ceolwulf, whom they had set up, reigned around London and in Essex. To King Alfred, then, was left nought save the lands south of Thames, and that the Danes grudged him, and thought scorn that it should yet be his.

§ 14. On Wessex, then, dashed those three Kings, with wondrous swarms newly come in from Denmark. Unto Chippenham they came, and spread over the land, covering the face of the earth like locusts, and taking all for themselves, for none could withstand them. Of the land-folk some fled over sea, some bowed them to the foe, some were in hiding with King Alfred in the fens,—and few these were.

But now that King Alfred had neither land nor hope longer, the Lord looked down upon the remnant of His people. . . .

Here follows Asser, §§ 58-69, much abbreviated, viz., the Danish defeat in Devon, Alfred's decisive victory at Ethandune, Guthrum's baptism, the Continental doings of the Danes, their attempt on Rochester.

§ 15. Then did King Alfred from Kent send a sea force unto East Anglia. And they came to Stour-mouth, and there met they 16 ships of the Vikings,[1] and worsted them in fight. But as they were homeward bound, all laden with spoil, there bore down upon them a Viking fleet, and no small one. And when it came to fighting therewith, they had this time the worse. . . .

[Here follow the deaths of Carloman and Marinus, Asser, §§ 71, 73).]

* * * * *

1 Henry of Huntingdon is the earliest authority for the use of this name, which is probably derived from the Teutonic *wig* = war.

§ 16. The Danish Host went up the Seine, even to Paris Bridge, and there they wintered. And this year [886] King Alfred beset London, for most of the Danes therein had followed into France after their Host. Then, so soon as the Danes were off, did the English [of London] bow to him with one accord, and gave him entrance as their King. And he gave the city in ward to Ethelred the Alderman. . . .

[Here follows a short account of Continental affairs, and the subsequent Danish invasion of England, in 893, from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.]

* * * * *

§ 17. Thus did King Alfred reign over all England, save what was under the Danish sway, for twenty-eight and a half years; then felt he the sting of death. His unwearied rule, his never-ending toil, may I not worthily set forth save in verse:

Thine own greatness inborn, O Alfred mighty in battle,
Made thee the Teller of Truth, and truth-telling made thee a doer,
And thy doing of deeds hath made thee a name everlasting.
Not without sadness thy joy, thy hopes with fear interwoven.
Ever, when worsted, thou madest thee ready to fight on the morrow,
Ever when victor, the more didst dread thee to fight on the morrow,
Stained was thy garment with sweat, with gore thy falchion bepainted;
Marking how heavily weighed upon thee the burden of kingship.
Nay, for in all the wide world like thee we find not another,
Who 'mid so many an ill, might breathing-space gain for a moment.
Never could foeman's steel his steel beat down from his handgrip,
Never was forged the blade that could end his toil with a sword-stroke.
Now that the woes of his reign and his life-long labours are over,
Christ be to him true Rest, be Christ his kingdom unending.

[*Nobilitas innata tibi probitatis honorem*
Armipotens Ælfrede dedit, probitasque laborem,
Perpetuumque labor nomen. Cui mixta dolore.
Gaudia semper erant; spes semper mixta timore.
Si modo victus eras, ad crastina bella parabas,
Si modo victor eras, ad crastina bella timebas.
Cui vestes sudore jugi, cui sica cruore
Tincta jugi, quantum sit onus regnare probarunt.
Non fuit immensi quisquam per climata mundi
Cui tot in adversis vel respirare liceret.
Nec tamen aut ferro contritus ponere ferrum
Aut gladio potuit vitæ finire labores.
Jam, post transactos vitæ regnique dolores,
Christus ei sit vera quies, sceptrumque perenne.]

VII.

FLORENCE OF WORCESTER.

FLORENCE was a monk of Worcester, and died 1118. His 'Chronicle' extends from the English Conquest to 1117. For the reign of Alfred, it is merely a slightly abridged copy of Asser, so far as Asser goes, and afterwards of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

Several MSS. of this work exist, all of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The standard text is that of Petrie ('Monumenta'), and has been translated in 'The Church Historians of England.

The following extracts are given :

SECTION.	
4.	Of St. Edmund.
5.	Of St. Swithun.
10.	Of Bishop Denewulf.
13.	Alfred's stronghold.
15.	His death and glory.

FLORENCE OF WORCESTER.

§ 1. For our period Florence copies almost throughout verbatim either from Asser or the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, with here and there a slight difference in the arrangement of his items, and, very occasionally, a touch or two of his own. He thus gives us the birth and pedigree of Alfred, the first wintering here of the Danes in 851 (which, like Asser, he places in Sheppey, not Thanet), the sack of Canterbury, 'that is the chief city of Kent,' and London, 'which lieth on the North bank of the River Thames, on the boundary of Essex and Middlesex, though, indeed, this city pertaineth to Essex,' and the Battle of Ockley.

§ 2. Next comes Ethelwulf's subjugation of the Welsh and his sending of Alfred to Rome [853]. 'Pope Leo, at his father's asking, wholly gave him due place [*oppido ordinans*], anointed him to be King, and taking him for his own son by adoption, confirmed him.'

§ 3. The fight at Thanet, the marriage of Elswitha to Burghed of Mercia, Ethelwulf's tything, pilgrimage to Rome, and marriage, follow as in Asser, also Ethelbald's conspiracy, and the story of Edburga. Then comes the death of Ethelwulf and Ethelbald's incest.

§ 4. 'In 855, Edmund, a man most holy and acceptable to God, sprung from Old Saxon stock, the truest of Christians, pleasant-spoken and kind to all, for meekness far-famed, free-handed [*liberaliter dapsilis*] toward the needy; to orphans and widows the kindness of patrons; gained the supreme authority [*culmen regiminis*] in the province of East Anglia.'

§ 5. The reign of Ethelbert is marked only by the Danish raid on Winchester, and in 862 we read 'St. Swithun passed away and sought the starry height in the 10th Indiction, the 6th of the Nones of July [July 2], on the fifth day [of the week].'

§ 6. The harrying of Kent, the Danes in East Anglia, their capture of York, the death of Bishop Ealhstan, the comet of 868, the marriage of Alfred, the march to Nottingham, follow with one original sentence:

'The oratory of St. Andrew the Apostle at Kemsege was built, and was dedicated by Alhun, Bishop of Worcester.

§ 7. The return of the Danes to York is followed by their raid upon East Anglia, where

'Edmund, the most holy and glorious King, as is read in his Passion, was martyred by King Ingwar, an utter heathen [*paganissimus*], in the second Indiction, on Sunday the 12th of the Kalends of December [November 20].'

§ 8. The events of the year 871 are wholly from Asser, from whom also, on Alfred's accession Florence inserts the notice of his infancy and boyhood, his thorn in the flesh, his children, his versatility, his devoutness, his liberality, and his zeal for education. And under the date of 872 he tells of his galaxy of teachers (including Asser).

§ 9. The conquest of Mercia by 'the Danish pirates,' and their subjugation of Northumbria and Cambridge, Alfred's first sea-fight, the episodes of Wareham and Exeter, bring us to 876, where Florence adds: 'Rollo and his men invaded [*penetravit*] Normandy, on the 15th of the Kalends of December [November 17].' The destruction of the Danish fleet at Swanage is given, not from Asser but from the Anglo-Saxon-Chronicle.

§ 10. The overrunning of Wessex, and the following events of 878 are taken from Asser (without the story of the cakes). In 879 we read:

'Dunbert, Bishop of Winchester being dead, Denewulf succeeded. He, if fame is to be trusted, to an advanced age was not merely unlettered, but a mere swineherd, whom King Alfred, when he fled to the woods for the violence of his enemies, lit upon as he was feeding his pigs. Perceiving his good wit, he put him to school, and after he was fully instructed, created him Bishop of Winchester; a truly miraculous transaction [*commentus rem dignam miraculo*].

§ 11. The foreign doings of the Danes follow, and their attempt on Rochester, all from Asser, whose death, by some extraordinary blunder, Florence records in 883, in connection with Alfred's Mission to India, and whom he copies so slavishly that he does not correct even his most obvious slips of the pen.

§ 12. He next gives Asser's account of Alfred's troubles, his abbeys, his systematic almsgiving and devotion (with a description of his lantern), and his administration of justice.

§ 13. The defeat of the Danes in Britanny, their return to England, the simultaneous invasion under Hasting, and the rising of the resident Danes, follow as in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, with the following additional details:

'And when this was known, King Alfred took with him part of his army, (leaving part, as he was wont, at home, and placing some, too, on garrison duty in his castles and cities), hied him with all speed to Kent, and pitched his camp between the two Heathen hosts, in a spot strong by nature, (girded to wit by brimming waters, whose waves ran high [*undis admodum crispantibus*], by high rocks and by overhanging woods), so that, forsooth, if they should seek any open country for spoil or fight he might instantly join battle with them. But they, now on foot, now on horse, raiding by bands, haunted in their harrying those parts where they saw the King's army was not. Yet did many a man, not only of the King's force, but of burghers, almost every day and night, surprise and slaughter them, harassing them to such a degree that they forsook Kent and burst forth on foray from all their holds at once. So had they done once before, when first they took up their

abode hereabouts. But this time held they more and choicer [*uberiorem*] spoil, and were fain to cross Thames river and get them into Essex,—thus to meet, booty and all, with the ship-host whom they had sent before them.'

§ 14. The Battle of Farnham, the capture of Beamfleet, the episode of the sons of Hasting, the Danish attack on Devon, and their defeats at Chichester and at Buttington, where 'many thousands of the Heathen were slain,' their march to Chester, 'which was at that time uninhabited,' the capture of their fleet in the Lea, and their final break up at Coatbridge, are told from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

'O with what ceaseless harrying, with what grievous raids, in what dire and piteous fashion was all England then vexed, not only by the Danes who had occupied parts of the land, but by these sons of Satan' [the Danes from abroad].

§ 15. The final suppression of the Danish piracies by Alfred's guardships brings us to his death:

'Renowned, warlike, victorious; the devoted champion of widows, wards, orphans, and poor; the master of Saxon song-craft; the darling of his people; kind of speech to all, and free of hand; endowed with prudence, fortitude, justice and temperance; so patient under his daily infirmity; so fair and so sagacious in awarding sentence; so watchful and so devout in God's service; Alfred, King of the Anglo-Saxons, son of the most religious King Ethelwulf, having completed 29 years and six months of his reign, died in the fourth Indiction, on the 5th of the Kalends of November [October 28], and at Winton in the New Monastery is he buried, awaiting the robe of a blessed immortality, and the glory of the resurrection with the just.

'To him succeeded his son Edward, surnamed the Elder, in letters inferior to his father, but in dignity, in power, and eke in glory above him.'

VIII.

GAIMAR.

LITTLE is known of this writer; but there is good reason to assign his work to the middle of the twelfth century. It is a rhyming chronicle, in French, founded upon the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, with various additions from floating legends, beginning with the English Conquest, and ending with the death of Rufus.

Four thirteenth-century MSS. exist, and the earlier portion is printed by Petrie in 'Monumenta Britannica.'

The extracts here given are these:

LINE.
1. 2526. Of the Kings Ethelwulf, Ethelbald, and Ethelbert.
2. 2569. Of the coming in of the Danes.
3. 2725. Of King Ella.
4. 2840. Of the Danes at Nottingham.
5. 2870. Of King Edmund.
6. 2933. Of the Danes in Wessex.
7. 2955. Of the field of Reading.

LINE.
8. 3015. How Ethelred died.
9. 3023. How Alfred reigned.
10. 3065. Of the Danes at Cambridge.
11. 3130. Of Alfred in Athelney.
12. 3261. Of the Danes in France.
13. 3398. How the Danes came back.
14. 3439. How Alfred died; and of his greatness.

L. 2526. Ten years and nine reigned the King [Ethelwulf], and at Winchester was he buried. Son was he to King Egbert, who made all the realm obey him. His two sons, whom he gat by his first wife, had his kingdom. Edelbald had all Wessex, Edelbyrht held Kent, Sussex, Essex, and Surrey. Kings of might they were, all their life long. King Edelbald reigned five years; then died he; life failed him. King Edelbyrht was his brother; he took Wessex as was right. Six years did he reign; then he died; and to Sherburn they bare him after his brother. Very dear to the English died he; for these two lost Kings had ofttimes worsted the Danes. . . .

Here comes in the harrying of Hampshire and East Kent (Asser, § 22).

L. 2569. In the time of this King [Ethelred] came the great fleet; the like saw never no man who saw not this. In East Anglia came they to land, and there abode over winter [866]. In March, for mockery, made they truce with that folk. Then they mounted them on the best horses their vassals had, and in ships too went some. So far as to Humber set they sail. Marched there on foot more than twenty thousand; great wonder it is to tell thereof. Turned then these Danes, and passed the water at Grimsby, those on foot and all, together. Great plenty had they of people. With the ships went they all to York; great war waged they there both by land and water. . . .

Here Gaimar tells how the Danes had been brought in by Bruern, a Northumbrian Baron, whose wife the King had dishonoured; and adds a spirited legend of the rival King Ella (Asser, § 30). When the Danes surprised York, he tells us:

L. 2725. Ella the King was sitting in the wood: four bisons had the King taken in hunting. Sitting was he at his dinner; he heard a [blind] man sound a bell. In his hand he held it, a little bell; clear it sounded as a chime [*eschelete*]. Food he asked; the King bade serve him therewith. Said the King to a knight, 'We have done well to-day: four bisons and six deer [*cheverels*]: all we hunted have we taken.' From afar the blind man heard him; then spake he a true word: 'And if in this wood you have taken so much, you have lost all this land. Better have the Danes done: York have they taken; Osbert is slain by his foes.' Answered the King: 'How knowest thou this?' 'My sense showeth me. . . . At York shall be a great battle. If thou believest

me not, get thee on. Howbeit none otherwise can it be. A King must needs there lose his head. . . .'

L. 2822. King Ella rode on madly . . . he was beside himself. On all sides were the Danes. Slain there was Ella the King. . . . The place is now called Ella-Cross. . . . Never a Dane took rest till all the land north of Humber was brought under them. . . .

L. 2840. Then went they into Mercia; in this realm the Danes took Nottingham. . . . King Burghred [*Bureth*] gathered a host; to Ethelred [*Edelreth*] he sent, who reigned over Wessex. A brother he had, Alfred [*Elured*]; right well he knew how to give good counsel, and to draw up a battle; well-skilled was he in war; clerk was he, and good astronomer.

These two called their host, and came and beset Nottingham. But the Danes within full easily kept them off. All were glad when they took a truce. . . .

The Danes now return to York and march thence to Thetford, the Mercian and Northumbrian levies accompanying them. This information is given us by Gaimar alone.

L. 2870. A King they found in this land; Edmund was his name. A good Christian he was, and the friend of God; a holy man. This King fought, and all the folk he had; but win he might not, for the many the Danes had. Bravely they fought, but the field was the foe's. King Edmund was driven to a castle. . . . The Heathen came hard after. Edmund went out to meet them. The first they met took him. Then asked they, 'Where is Edmund? Tell us.' 'That will I freely and at once. Before the fight Edmund was here, and I. When I fled the field, so did he. If he will 'scape you I know not.' Now is the King's end in the hand of God, and of Jesus whom he served. . . . When they knew St. Edmund, the miscreants, full cruelly bade they him deny God's Faith, and Christ the Maiden-born. Said the King, 'Not so. Firm will I hold to Him.' What then did the foe? To a tree made they bind him. . . . They shot the King with hand-bows. So full was his body of the darts of these villains, as is of prickles the skin of the hedgehog, when he bears off apples from the garden.[1] . . . Then sent they a wicked man, Coran Colbe was his name, to cut off the saint's head. Thus was Edmund the Martyr slain. . . .

1 The hedgehog was supposed to rob orchards by biting off the fruit and carrying it away impaled upon his spines.

L. 2933. When they had done this shame turned they from thence, and went straight to Reading. Slowly they went; towns they wasted and cities; and Christians they slew, and churches they spoiled. . . . Two counts on horseback went to Englefield. There found they Edelwolf, a great baron of that land. He had gathered his friends . . . a many Danes they killed, and one of the counts, Sidrac; wicked was he and warlike. . . .

L. 2955. Four days after Ethelred and his brother Alfred came to Reading, with a very great host. The Danes soon sallied out. In the open field was the fray; all day long it lasted. There Edelwolf was killed. And Edelred and Alfred were driven to Wiscletet [Wistley Green, near Twyford]. There is a ford towards Windsor by the riverside in a moor; Twyford was ever the name of that ford. Hither came the Host in chase, and wotted not of that ford. So the English escaped; but many were killed and wounded. . . .

Next come the battles of Ashdown, Basing, and Merton.

L. 3015. Then came in a mighty tyrant; Summerlede the Great[1] was his name. . . . He would have fought King Ethelred, but he died; he is in his coffin. At Wimborne the King is laid; but five years did he reign. . . .

L. 3023. Then reigned King Alfred; Ethelwolfing was he called [*i.e.* the son of Ethelwolf]. Gathered the Danes, and sought him in Wessex. At Wilton was he found, with the few he got together; he fought, but 'twas in vain; from the field they chased him, and into the greenwood. . . . And this year the Danes took a truce from King Alfred, then forsook they Reading. In London they wintered. . . .

Here follows their conquest of Mercia.

L. 3065. Then went they divers ways. In London stayed Ingwar; and Halfdene the other King went to war with the Picts. Oft put he them to the worse; and eke Stretclued, King of Galloway.[2] The Kings Godrum, Oschetel, and Anwynd took counsel they should to Grantabridge [Cambridge] and beset the city. So did they; quickly from Repton led they their great host. Almost a year endured the siege; like fools, they left it in the end;

1 *I.e.* a summer-lead.

2 This is another curious confusion. Galloway was part of the British kingdom of Strathclyde.

much they lost and little they gained. Then away they rode by stealth, straight to Wareham. . . .

Here follow the events at Wareham, Exeter, and Swanwich, where 'one hundred and forty ships went to the devil': and the overrunning of Wessex by the Danes.

L. 3130. With all their will set they them to do evil. Ministers they brake down, and houses, and chapels, and monasteries. They drave folk from the land; and many did they bind in prison. King Alfred, their Lord, he knew not what to do, nor yet what to say. . . . He kept him in the woods and wilds, to 'scape their bloody hands. . . .

L. 3141. Nevertheless he gathered all he might . . . oft slew he some of them. A brother of Iware [Ingwar] and Halfdene, did he kill, in the forest of Pen; an evil-doer was he, and his name was Ubbe [Hubba]. When the Danes found him, they made over him a great mound, and they called it Ubbe-lawe.[1] The mound is in Devon. There were many slain; eight hundred and forty there fell; perjured, bloodthirsty felons they were. The war-flag of Ubbe was taken; the name thereof was The Raven.

We now come to the rising of the English and their victory at Ethandune: 'I cannot say aright which side had the more slain, but this know I well, that good King Alfred and his barons there won renown and victory'—the baptism of Guthrum, and the departure of the Danes to France, 'more than a hundred Kings with their hosts.'

L. 3261. At Yarmouth put they to sea; unto Chézig came they. . . . All the land they wasted . . . sore wailed the peasants . . . the crucifixes brake they down . . . many barons did they slay. . . . So brake the Heathen into a land toward Bretagne; St. Lo was its name. . . . The folk of Bretagne they fought like wild men [*felons*]. Thanks be to God, the God of glory, over the Danes had they the victory. There did those Heathen perish together: all their pride and all their fame in one day. Into France came they back no more. . . .

Here we find the interchange of gifts between Alfred and Pope Marinus (Asser, § 71); the death of Charles and his kinship to Judith—'never knew lady more of the Faith'—Alfred's rebuilding of London, and the death of Guthrum.

L. 3398. Then came it to pass that the Heathen Host appeared again, which went into France; all that realm had they

1 Till the seventeenth century there was a mound near Kinwith Castle, on the sandhills by Barnstaple Bay, called the Hubba Stone.

wasted. . . . Now had they store of spoil, of gold, of silver, and of horses of great price. At Cherbourg put they to sea; and to Limne-mouth came they. . . . All the coasts by the sea did those foemen harry; ill hap, indeed, was their return. Ships had they two hundred and fifty; much evil did their stay. From the other side came back Estein [Hasting]; into Thames drew he, and a large fleet. In Kent he did after his own will. . . . When these two hosts were together, they went about destroying Christendom. . . .

L. 3439. Then came it to pass, as it pleased God, Alfred, who fought so well, died. Then from the Nativity, from the day wherein God was born, had passed nine hundred years and one, to the day King Alfred died. For twenty and eight years right well did he reign; few such be now living. For wise was he, and a warrior good; well knew he how to curb his foes. Never was better clerk than he, for from childhood upwards had he learning. A book made he write in English, of deeds, and of laws, and of battles in the land, and of Kings who made war. Books a many made he to write, which learned men go oft to read. May God have mercy on his soul, and St. Mary our Lady.

Then reigned his son Edward, the valiant, the wise, the courteous.

IX.

ROGER OF WENDOVER.

'FLOWERS OF HISTORY.'

THIS writer was a monk of St. Albans, who died 1237. His work covers the world's history to 1235, and, so far as our period is concerned, is almost wholly taken from earlier authorities. He inserts, however, various interesting and picturesque details, which are here given; and never fails to record the various ecclesiastical changes of the time.

Roger's work was carried on by Matthew Paris, and passed under his name. In the next century it was pirated, name and all, by Matthew of Westminster.

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ROGER OF WENDOVER.

§ 1. In the year of our Lord 837 . . . Egbert, King of the West Saxons . . . departed out of this world. . . . After him came his son Ethelwulf or Adulf, who had four sons of fame . . . who all reigned after him. He had also a fifth son, Athelstan, born out of wedlock, to whom he gave the realms which his father Egbert won. . . .

[Here follows Henry of Huntingdon's introduction of the Danes into England; his account of the birth and parentage of Alfred, and events to the Battle of Ockley and the marriage of Elswitha. Roger here inserts the tale of the Old Woman of Berkley, immortalized by Southey. Continuing, he tells of Ethelwulf's subjugation of Wales, of his tithing charter, his journey to Rome.]

§ 2. With him he took the youngest and dearest of his sons, Alfred, that he might be instructed by Pope Leo in faith and morals. A whole year tarried he there with his son, and had him crowned King by the Pope, and a few days after set forth homewards. And on the way he wedded Judith . . . and brought her to England. But meanwhile was there a plot formed against him . . . to keep him out of the realm . . . for twofold cause. First because he had Alfred, his youngest, crowned at Rome, as though to shut out his elder sons from the kingship; and next that he had slighted all the women of England in wedding a stranger. . . .

[Next comes the story of Edburga (from Asser) and the partition of the kingdom.]

§ 3. In the year of our Lord 855 . . . Edmund . . . took over the rule of the East Angles, in the 13th year of his age, on the day of our Lord's Nativity. Chosen King he was, that pious and godly youth, of all the Lords and Commons of that realm; and, sore against his will, needs must he reign. And the gift of hallowing took he from Humbert, Bishop of Elmham, in a town-royal called Bures. . . .

[After this comes the death and will of Ethelwulf, who is said to have been Bishop of Winchester before his coronation. Ethelbald's marriage with Judith follows.]

§ 4. But in the year 859 of our Lord, did Ethelbald . . . repent him of his fault, and did penance therefor. Judith, his stepmother, did he put away; and ruled his realm for the rest of his days in peace and righteousness. . . .

[His death follows, and that of St. Swithun, with sundry legends of that saint, and how:

'When he had to dedicate any new church, never would he ride thither nor yet be drawn, however long the way, but stoutly went on foot, and this by night, lest it should be set down to ostentation. For never made he show of his good deeds.'

The reign and death of Ethelbert are next touched on, the accession of Ethelred, and the great Danish invasion of East Anglia, and their sack of York (Asser, § 31), with the additional entry that 'The Kings of the Northumbrians being thus slain, a certain Englishman named Egbert for six years ruled the realm, under the Danes.']

§ 5. In the same year [867] died Alfstan, Bishop of Sherborne. In the day of Egbert, and of Ethelwulf his son, great was his power in the realm. For by his statecraft brought he Kent and East Anglia under Egbert. He stirred up Ethelwulf, also, against the Danes . . . and himself raised money, and gathered a host, and fought with the foe many a stout fight, and won them, too. His power may be judged from his having kept King Ethelwulf out of the kingdom, on his return from Rome, and made his son Ethelbald King in his stead, till at length he suffered him to share the kingdom. He ruled his church 50 years. . . .

[We now read of Alfred's wedding, of the Danes at Nottingham, and their great raid of 870.]

§ 6. Old and young did these cut-throats slaughter, whomsoever they met; and holy matrons and virgins they shamefully handled. . . .

[Here we are told how the nuns of Coldingham, to escape dishonour, cut off their own noses, on beholding which, 'the tyrants rushed in haste away, nor would make one moment's tarrying.' They burnt the Abbey, however, nuns and all.]

After this, sailed they, the wicked miscreants, along the coast, wasting with fire and sword all that ever they came to. . . . The noblest Abbeys along the coast were wasted; Lindisfarne (wherein was then the Bishop's see) . . . Tynemouth, Jarrow, Wearmouth (wherein Bede the Priest was brought up), Streonshall [Whitby] (founded by the Blessed Hilda. . . .).

Through Yorkshire next passed they, burning churches, towns and villages, utterly destroying all folk, of whatsoever sex and

age. . . . Going on thence they brake down all the Abbeys of monks and virgins in the fens . . . Crowland, Thorney, Ramsey, Hampstead (which is now called Peterborough), and Ely, so famous of old. . . .

§ 7. [Roger next tells at great length the story of St. Edmund, how Lodbroc, father of Ingwar and Hubba, was murdered at his court, and how the murderer persuaded the sons that Edmund had done the deed, how thereupon they invaded England to avenge it, and, landing at Berwick, marched, ravaging as they went, to East Anglia.]

There camped they, at a town called Thetford, and put to the sword all they found, men and women . . . that the King might not be able to raise an army . . . for they had heard the prowess of King Edmund, and also of his size and stature beyond all men. . . . Then sent they to the King . . . a message . . . after this sort. 'Lord Ingwar, the dread and invincible King of the Danes, is come hither to winter. Despise him, and your life and kingdom are of little worth.' . . . Then groaned Edmund and asked counsel of the Bishop of Elmham, saying, 'O Humbert, servant of the Living God . . . here be these fierce barbarians . . . who would blot us out. . . . But never will I . . . be under a heathen, when, by dying for my land, I can become a standard-bearer in the kingdom eternal. . . . Moreover God is my witness that no fear shall separate me from the love of Christ, alive or dead.' Turning then to the messenger . . . he said . . . 'Hasten back to your master, and bear him my answer . . . that never shall you make me subject to an unbeliever. . . .'

§ 8. Then bade King Edmund that his comrades fly to arms . . . to fight for faith and fatherland. . . . From morn to eve raged the battle, and the whole field was red with the blood of the slain. And the pious King was woe, not alone for the slaughter of his comrades . . . for they, he well knew, had attained the Martyr's crown; . . . but much more bitterly bewailed he the doom of the unbelievers, thus hurled into the gulf of hell. . . . Thus, after the fray, he steadfastly purposed never again to fight with the barbarians . . . 'but alone,' said he, 'will to die for the people, that the whole nation perish not. . . .'

§ 9. Then fled he to the church . . . and humbly prayed God to grant him strength to suffer. . . . Led forth was he before the wicked chief, who bade bind him to a tree thereby; whereafter he was long scourged and mocked every way. But he, Christ's

undaunted champion, called ever on Him between every stroke, to the fury of his tormentors. . . . So they shot him till he was all covered with arrows . . . as a hedgehog with spines. And when Ingwar . . . could never make him forsake his faith in Christ . . . be bade . . . cut off his head . . . even as he was praying and confessing the name of Christ. . . .

§ 10. The headless body of the martyr . . . left those servants of Satan in Hailesdon Wood amid the thick briars . . . that it might not have Christian burial . . . and his head cast they into that same wood . . . to be devoured by the beasts of the field. . . . But, when spring drew on, all the Heathen left East Anglia. On hearing this the Christians everywhere came forth from hiding, and did their best to find the head of King Edmund. . . . Then came a wondrous thing . . . for as they searched among the brake, and called one to another in their native tongue 'Where are you? Where are you?' the martyr's head made answer in the same tongue, 'Here, here, here.' So found they a huge wolf, with the head between its paws as watching over it. . . . Praising God, they bare it to the body . . . and laid both in a fit tomb. . . . And the wolf followed to the grave, and went back to the wild. . . . Now the martyr suffered in the year of our Lord 870, the 29th of his age and 16th of his reign, on the 12th day of December. . . . In the same year was the see of Dunwich transferred to Elmham, and instead of two Bishops, the one at Dunwich and the other at Elmham, one only was made. . . .

§ 11. [Here follows the invasion of Wessex; the battles of Englefield, Reading, Ashdown, Basing, and Merton; the accession of Alfred; his pedigree; his childhood: his infirmity; his virtues;—all from Asser.

Next comes the Battle of Wilton; the calling in of Grimbald, Asser, etc.; the Danish conquest of Mercia and Northumbria—'which touched Ricsy, the last King thereof, so deeply that he died of a broken heart'; their taking of Cambridge, Wareham and Exeter; and the sea-fight at Swanage.]

In the year 878 . . . Guthrum, King of the Danes, had passed through every realm of England, with boldness unconquerable, laying waste every holy spot, and sharing out amongst his men all the silver and gold he might come by. Now, at last (hearing of the fame of King Alfred, how, in forethought, wisdom, and wealth, he was beyond all Kings that were in England), he turned thitherward his impious arms. Towns and villages he gave to the flames, whomsoever he met them put he to the sword . . . sparing neither man nor woman, nor yet the tender babe. . . .

[Here Roger brings in the Danish defeat at Kinwith, where 'the blood of Edmund was avenged by the sword of Alfred.' But he makes the ravage of Wessex continue still.]

§ 12. In this storm of persecution, the faithful Bishops of Christ fled over sea, with the relics of the saints and the treasures of the churches. With them went much people; and some, with King Alfred, sought hiding in the woods and deserts, through that evil time. . . .

There is a spot in the West called Athelney . . . girded in by fen on all sides, so that by boat only can it be come at. On this islet is there a thicket of alders, full of stags and goats and other such creatures, and in the midst a bit of open ground, scarce two acres. Hither, in his distress, came Alfred all alone. . . .

[Here is the episode of the cakes; the reproof of St. Neot; the vision of St. Cuthbert; the English rising; the victory of Ethandune; the Baptism of Guthrum; the Peace of Wedmore; the Danish invasion of Gaul.

§ 13. Next follows a curious entry, which appears to show that some part of Northumbria, at least (probably the northern province Bernicia), now more or less shook off the Danish yoke, and became once more an English under-kingdom.]

St. Cuthbert . . . in a vision . . . bade tell the Bishop there to buy back Cuthred, whom the Danes had sold as a slave, and to make him their King [*i.e.* English under-king of Bernicia] . . . and he was crowned in the 13th year of King Alfred. In the year 882 the Bishop's see which was erst at Lindisfarne was transferred to Chester [le Street]. The saint bade also . . . that whosoever should flee to his body in the hour of need should for a month be unharmed. And King Alfred, and eke King Cuthred, doomed this to be so for ever. And the aforesaid Kings gave unto St. Cuthbert, over and above the old see, the whole land between Tees and Tyne. . . . Then the Bishopric of Hagulstad [Hexham] ceased to be, through the outburst of the Heathen.[1] . . .

§ 14. [Here follows the gift of Marinus, the mission to India, the story of John Scotus (from Simeon of Durham, § 59); the fights at Rochester; Charles the Fat's vision (from the Chronicle of St. Neot's, § 10); Alfred's repair of London; and a list of all former English Kings. Then we come to the Danish ravages in France under Hasting.]

After inflicting on Gaul all this wretchedness . . . Hasting—the wicked thief—sailed off to Lunis, and thought to storm the city. But the townsfolk . . . flew to arms . . . and, do all he could, he

[1] The see of the united bishoprics was finally transferred to Durham.

might not win the place. So, at the last, he sent unto the Bishop . . . saying that he was sick unto death, and was humbly fain to be christened. Thereat was the Bishop full glad; and they made peace with this enemy of peace, and freely let his folk into the city. So this wicked Hasting was borne unto the Church, and dipped in the sacred font. And the Bishop and the Mayor upraised him therefrom [*i.e.* stood sponsors] to their own destruction, and he received the Holy Chrism, and to his ship was he borne back again.

§ 15. Thereafter, at dead of night, was he clad in armour, and laid on a bier; and, under their coats, he bade his men wear shirts of mail; and so, with feigned lamentation, bare they him to the church, as dead. There, in his sacred vestments, was the Bishop, all ready to sacrifice the Host for the departed—when, lo! up from the bier sprang that son of perdition, Hasting; down he cut the Bishop and the Count, and fell, raging like a wolf, upon the people . . . old and young were massacred, the city was spoiled, and the walls thereof beaten down. . . .

§ 16. [Alfred's abbeys are next recorded, and his method in almsgiving and devotion, also his lantern, his justice, his sister's death, the adventure of the three Irishmen, and the comet of 892, 'which is called in the Saxon tongue *Vexed Star*.'[1] Alfred's system of 'Hundreds' follows; and then the great invasion, of 893, with another story of Hasting.]

But the heathen . . . fled . . . to Milton, whither the King hotly chased them, and stayed not till he had driven them one and all into the stronghold that Hasting the Cruel had wrought there. Straightway did he beset the place . . . and gave his whole mind to the taking of it. And Hasting the Dane (since of holding out he lost all hope) bethought him how he might, by falsehood, cheat the King into pity. . . . Sureties gave he, and bound him by oath, that, might he but be let go, never more would he vex England. And the more to assure the King, he sent unto him his two sons—but boys were they—that, if he would, he might give them the Sacraments of the Faith and Baptism. Ever was the pious King more ready to save the souls of the heathen than to slay them . . . and, after the boys were regenerated in the sacred Font, then suffered he their father Hasting, and the rest of the misbelievers, to depart in peace, according to the troth-plight. . . .

1 Roger misunderstands the Old English *fæxed*, *i.e.* haired, a literal rendering of the Latin *cometa*.

[The campaigns of 894 are now recorded, with the treason of Hasting and the capture of his wife and children.]

No harm would the King do unto them, seeing that he had himself upraised the one lad from the Font, and Earl Ethelred the other; therefore suffered he them to depart, mother and sons.

§ 17. [We now come to the campaigns of 895 and 896 (as in A.S. Chronicle); the vision of Rollo, and his invasion of 'the land which was then called Neustria, but now Normandy, from these very Northmen.'

The sea-fight in Devon is next mentioned (not described), and the hanging of the pirates.]

Thereafter did the King hold his realm in peace all the rest of his life; giving himself wholly to the repair of churches, to almsdeeds, and to law-giving. . . .

§ 18. In the year 900, Alfred, the Most Gracious King of English, changed his temporal kingdom for the eternal, on Wednesday the 28th day of October, in the fifth indiction. He was buried at Winchester in the New Monastery, which he himself had founded, clad in the robe of blessed immortality, and awaiting the General Resurrection, when once again shall he be crowned.

X.

JOHN OF WALLINGFORD.

THE chronicle seems to have been written about 1255, as it mentions Catherine, daughter of Henry III. (born 1253, died 1257), among his living progeny. The author was a monk of St. Alban's. It begins with the English Conquest, and ends with the accession of Edward the Confessor. Its materials are handled with marked freedom and confidence; the writer, in fact, belonged to the band of Higher Critics, as a glance at his pages will promptly show. All mere historical facts are made to bow to the preconceived idea with which he starts, in a fashion quite modern. He writes, however, with no little spirit and force, and is well worth reading.

His work is to be found in Gale's 'English Historian,' and a translation in 'The Church Historians of England.' There is an MS. in the Cottonian series, with a portrait of the author, seemingly by his own hand.

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2. Of the Coming of the Danes.
10. Of the birth and pedigree of Alfred.
11. Of his youthful wickedness.
12. Of Rollo.
14. Of Alfred and St. Neot.

SECTION
16. Of Guthrum and Wessex.
18. Of Alfred in Athelney.
20. Of the English rising.
22. Of Alfred's Laws.
23. Of his death.

JOHN OF WALLINGFORD.

§ 1. Egbert . . . next began to reign . . . and won for himself by a valiant arms-deed, all the realms that had been under the King of Mercia. For his son Ethelwulf sent he, with a mighty muster, to drive beyond Thames Baldred, King of Kent, . . . nor had Kent a King of her own any more, but yielded obedience unto the Kings of Wessex. . . . Meanwhile in Northumbria reigned Ethelred, and after him Osbert, for thirteen years. Him did the Northumbrians drive from his kingship, and in his stead put they Ella, howbeit not of the blood royal. . . .

[Here follows the Danish sack of York, from Asser.]

§ 2. Then did the Danes make Egbert King of such of the Northumbrian folk as were left, and there reigned he five years. Surrey also, and Sussex, and Essex, and East Anglia, yea and the Kings of Mercia came under him, and he reigned in all thirty years and five. . . . After him came his son Ethelwulf, . . . who left four sons, Ethelbald, Ethelbert, Ethelred, and Alfred. Ethelbald . . . reigned five years, and fought without ceasing against the Danes, as did his brothers after him, Ethelbert and Ethelred, . . . all alike giving their lives to free their folk and their fatherland. But amongst these brethren could Alfred get him no honour; for why he was as yet but a youth.

§ 3. Along with all these Kings was St. Swithun . . . far-famed amongst all his fellow-clerks for holy life and conversation. To him did the aforesaid King [Egbert] commit for teaching . . . his son Ethelwulf, his only comfort, the one hope of the realm and heir to all of right. . . . Fainer was he to live as a tonsured priest than of worldly worship and kingly power, . . . and in the church of Winchester came he unto the order of sub-deacon, and served it well, with good hope to rise further.

§ 4. But when Egbert . . . died, then did all the land-folk call for Ethelwulf, his only son, to be King, seeing that his alone was the right. Yet, forasmuch as it was a thing unheard of that a sub-deacon should be drawn back to the lay world, much strife arose thereon between the clergy and the laity. Then sought they counsel of the Apostolic See; . . . and Pope Leo, having called together a council on this petition, assented thereto (as being

the people's wish, and for the common weal), that Ethelwulf, by his dispensation, should fall back from his sub-diaconate to the kingship.

Of the Coming of the Danes.

§ 5. Now, then, are we entering on the troublous tale of many a war; wherefore we beg our reader, if he thinketh us all too brief, to look on this at least as a general sketch. In such storm of events who can track the course of each several wave? . . .

§ 6. On the origin of the Danes . . . historians differ. Some say they are sprung from the Trojan Antenor, . . . others, with perhaps more reason, . . . that they are . . . from the Goths . . . who issuing from . . . the island of Scanza [Scandinavia] set them down by the Mæotid Marsh [the sea of Azaf] and after in [Danubio] Denmark.[1] Amongst this folk long was it the wont (until it was checked when they took on the Christian Faith), that the father should drive forth all his sons, save one only to be his heir, . . . to seek them new homes, for that their own land might not support them all. Hence were they held as foes by all nations round about them. Let whoso will read their story, and he will find that Rome itself was not safe from these Goths. . . .

§ 7. And now . . . God, who can turn even evil unto good end, drew forth His sword to cut short the English, and made hordes beyond count to boil over, so to speak, from Denmark. Yea, and they abide even unto this day, a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence unto all around them. The first band at this time (for already held they many a place in England), led Ingwar and Hubba, . . . next came Rollo and his gang, then Guthrum. And all these, for twenty years, fulfilled in divers places the chastisement ordained before of God.

§ 8. Ingwar, then, and Hubba, landed first in Northumbria, and utterly wasted all that sea-bord, from the Scottish Sea even unto East Anglia. The shrines of the Saints burnt they; cities, hamlets and castles laid they even with the ground; yea, and sold for a slave Cuthred, a man of royal race, whom Hardecnut, one of their chiefs, had taken captive. But him did St. Cuthbert ere long set

1 The confusion between Denmark and the Danube is often in the Chroniclers. The Goths from Scandinavia really did settle first in southern Russia and then by the Danube.

free in wondrous wise, and exalted him to be King. Moreover they burnt the Abbey of Wearmouth, wherein the holy Bede, the friend of God, tasted of the joys of contemplation, and which, even unto this day, keepeth alive the name and fame of that Venerable Doctor. . . .

§ 9. Thereafter . . . came Ingwar unto East Anglia. This district faceth the North-east, and hath many a ship-harbour. Very safe is it from land attack . . . but without defence against perils from the sea. . . [There slew they Edmund], . . . the King and martyr, and joining unto them other Danes, froward as themselves, . . . who had, by this, won most part of Mercia, they even stormed and took London. Nor had the men of London any hope of escape, seeing that all the power of the South and West was broken. Only Ethelred reigned yet in West Anglia; and in the next year did he too pay the debt of nature, and Alfred, the last of the sons of Ethelwulf, reigned in his stead. . . .

Of Alfred, First Monarch of All England.

§ 10. In the year 849 from the Incarnation of our Lord was born Alfred, King of the Anglo-Saxons, in that part of England which is called Berkshire. . . .

[Here follows his pedigree, to Adam. 'I do not put this forward as authentic; but, should any man compile another, I should be still more fain to call it apocryphal.']

§ 11. Now Alfred, when first he began to reign, was wholly given 'to serve the old man,' and lived a slave to luxury. Led on by kingly sway, he 'yielded his members servants to uncleanness' . . . and neither bore about, as a Christian should, nor cared to bear about, any mark of the sufferings of Christ, but on the contrary. . . .

§ 12. About this time it came to pass, according to the Danish law afore-told, Rollo and his mates, being turned out from Denmark, sought them a settlement in other lands; and on his way raided many an island and alongshore. Like wolves that rush suddenly from the wood, they would bring their keels to land, gather great spoil, and aboard again, in full sail, soon out of sight. Many therefore were the complaints brought before King Alfred, from the ports and sea places.

§ 13. Thereupon called he his Council, and after taking thought along with them, came to this rede, that it were better to make peace with Rollo and his gang; for how to lead his force against men thus rushing in from sea, he knew not. Howsoever, he got such peace as he would; and Rollo joined by such Danes as were wandering through England with no certain dwelling-place, set sail, and entered Seine mouth, and, either with consent of the French or without it, gained there the seat and principality which his posterity still hold. . . .

§ 14. King Alfred, being chastened with many stripes from the hand of God and of man, turned from his wonted excess; and began to repent also for his past. Therefore went he to St. Neot, a man of holy life, whose name, by God's goodness, was of renown in the Court, to ask his counsel. The saint was then near the end of his days . . . at Nedestock, where he had long lived the ascetic life. It is in the furthest parts of Cornwall, and was called from St. Neot, its first in-dweller . . . for it was fit rather for wild beasts than for men, till the Saint with his own hand cut down the thickets and underwood.

§ 15. Sternly did the Saint rebuke him, as was meet, and, having been taught by Holy Writ to temper harshness and gentleness, he poured in oil and wine to the sinner's wounds. Thus he so struck fear into him, that he still gave him hope, and so inspired him with hope that he wavered not long, declaring to him boldly that the fire of hell was grievous, and grievous, too, the penance to be enjoined on him who would escape it. He counselled him, moreover, as he hoped for pardon, to charter the English School [at Rome,] and, without delay, to send an embassy thereupon unto our Lord the Pope. All this counsel the King fulfilled. . . .

§ 16. In the year 878 from the Incarnation of our Lord, and the seventh of King Alfred's reign, burst there forth, through the working of Danish law aforetold, a dreadsome plague, King Guthrum. In England landed he with a vast horde, like in cruelty unto their master and leader, debased by all heathen superstition, and brutal beyond even those who had come before him. For he did not merely, like them, raid the sea-coasts, and the regions roundabout, and bear off his spoil, and re-embark; but he openly harried inland, and burnt down villages, cities, and towns, walls and all.

§ 17. For in West Anglia and the Midlands the English, from the time they cast out the Britons, had lived at peace, . . . which itself is no small incentive to vice, . . . and gave themselves up to sloth and luxury, . . . eating and drinking, even as the brute beasts. On them therefore came a brute beast in man's shape, King Guthrum to wit, brutal and ferocious toward each and all, who with sword and axe wrought his bestial will. Nay, he spared not even such as threw themselves at his feet. Neither old nor young, boy or girl, mother nor maiden, spared he. For his eye spared none. And piteous was the slaughter that might be seen. There they lay in each road, and street, and crossway: old men with hoar and reverend locks, butchered at their own doors; young men headless, handless, footless; matrons foully dishonoured in the open street, and maidens with them; children stricken through with spears—all exposed to every eye and trodden under every foot. Some, too, there lay half-burnt under their half-burnt houses, not having dared to leave them; for they who were driven from their hiding-places by the fire perished by the sword.

§ 18. Dark forecastings [*rumores*], moreover, lacked there not . . . such as filled even the stout of heart with terror, and drave them to flight. King Alfred himself, even, was fain the rather to yield to the word of sooth, than meet this ravening foe, while his own folk were so scattered and divided. These woes, full well he thought, had come on his kingdom for his sins, and his people's sins. So he vowed him then to bear humbly, as indeed he needs must, that yoke of Divine discipline which St. Neot had foretold should come upon him. He turned his back therefore, and feared with all wisdom, and fled to good purpose, and came even unto Athelney, in the utmost parts of the West, which the British call the Isle of Peers. It lieth in the midst of salt marshes; but there is a fair plain within.

§ 19. Hither came he; and amid the storm of trouble bursting over him, he took on him that patience which rejoiceth in adversities, and thus far at least showed himself stout-hearted. . . . Deeply too did he bear in mind what he had often heard spoken by the saint: 'Mightiest torments await the mightiest'; and that word of the Apostle: 'The Lord scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.' . . . In a swine herd's hut he lay hid . . . and awaited

patiently the day of consolation, which also St. Neot had foretold. . . .

Here follows the story of the cakes, with the addition :

'Patiently did the King bear her reproaches, putting all down to the account of his penitence. . . . "It is as you say," he replied; "I am dull indeed." . . . Then set he himself diligently to the work . . . and gave all his mind to it till the bread was meetly baked.' . . .

§ 20. In the meantime God looked down upon the humble repentance of His King, and stretched forth His Holy Hand to free him. For, being found by a few of his old warriors, they led him to come forth into the open. There, in a few days, wrought he a fortress strong enough for his end, and gathered to him many a brave warrior, good at need. So was he able, through his repentance, to resist the more stoutly. At first, indeed, he hovered around the foe, and by twilight came upon them, when least looked for, out of his woods and fastnesses: but soon in broad daylight, and openly. When they made any move, well knew he their purpose, and came upon them ere they might fulfil it. And when he had struck his blow, he withdrew him into safety. So first cleared he the path to victory; then did he make it his own.

§ 21. Those warriors too who had fled the land, when they heard that King Alfred was once more in the field, with all speed crossed again the sea, and came to his leaguer; so day by day grew he stronger, and closlier harassed the foe. He sent, moreover, messengers to Rollo, who was ever warring upon the French, . . . to come to his aid. And he, because of the kindness shown him by Alfred, . . . gave up, for that time, the siege of Paris, whereon he was set, and crossed back to England. . . . So the King's host grew larger daily. And Guthrum also gathered no small force, and, careless of the lives of his men, wished only for the day of battle. But Alfred, though, through the Saint's promise, assured of victory, yet, like a good shepherd, had regard to his flock, and waited the day foretold by the Saint for fighting. On the top of a hill waited he, which he had heedfully taken first, for that it would have been the very place for the foe, had they but thought of it in time.

[Here follows the victory of Ethandune and the baptism of Guthrum.]

§ 22. With all justice ruled King Alfred his realm, even as St. Neot counselled him. For he put in writing the laws and right

customs of the Kings before him, and handed them down to them that came after him to be kept. And many of the laws and customs of the old Britons turned he into the English tongue, Among these was the Merchene Leaga [Mercian Law], set up by a wise and noble British Queen, Marcia [!]. Some too added he of his own, so founded upon justice that none may find any fault therein. Hence may it be seen how devout was his life, following the counsel of the Saint and the paths of righteousness.

§ 23. When King Alfred had fulfilled 28 years and a half of his reign, and 51 of his age, then paid he the debt due by corrupt human nature, and died in peace, on the 25th of October in the year from the Incarnation of our Lord 900.

XI.

JOHN OF BROMPTON.

JOHN OF BROMPTON was Abbot of Jorvaulx, in Yorkshire, under Henry VI., and cannot therefore be the *writer* of this chronicle, which, from internal evidence, is of the thirteenth century. It is called by his name because at the end of the MS. (in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge) a footnote states it to be his (*i.e.* as owner). The chronicle starts from the mission of Augustine, and begins with separate outlines of the histories of Kent, Essex, East Anglia, Wessex, Mercia, Northumbria, and Sussex, consecutively; going on to deal with that of 'the Kings of All England,' to the death of Richard Cœur de Lion. It embodies the Codes of Ina, Alfred (including his treaty with Guthrum), Edward the Elder, Athelstan, Edmund, Edgar, Ethelred, and Canute.

This chronicle makes use of Asser, Malmesbury, and other earlier authorities, but differs so notably in the sequence of events (especially in the Danish campaigns of Alfred) that the writer either had access to some independent source, now lost, or thought himself a historical redactor of the type with which the Higher Criticism of the present day has familiarized us—equal to rearranging the components of previous histories through the crucible of his own inner consciousness. No third explanation is possible; for he was evidently very far from a careless writer.

His chronicle is printed by Twysden in his 'Decem Scriptores' (1652).

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JOHN OF BROMPTON.

§ 1. Having thus in part, though by no means fully, treated of the Kings and Princes who reigned in British[1] days, and had dominion over diverse provinces (some succeeding by hereditary right, and some coming into possession through conquest), let us now briefly turn our attention to those from whom the Kings of all England had their first beginning. And let us go back to the noble and stout warrior Ethelbrict [Egbert], on whom we have already touched, amongst the Kings of Wessex.

§ 2. In Wessex he was born and bred, and was a hero mighty and warlike. But King Brithrich, who then reigned in Wessex, through jealousy of him, brake forth into such mad hatred that he conspired his death. But, when he spied the malice of the monarch, he went off into France, and there dwelt, until the aforesaid King departed this life. After the death of the King, however, the men of Wessex called him back into England, and crowned him for their King. Then, gathering his host, made he no small slaughter amongst the kinglets who stood against him; staying not his hand from war for 28 years together.[2] These others being at length overthrown, crushed, and subdued, in manly wise gat he him the sway of all this realm. And after the warfare was ended, nine years reigned he in peace: closing his days in the 38th year and 6th month of his reign. And his body was brought for burial to Wynton [Winchester].

§ 3. And thereafter was Ethelwolf, the son of Egbert who, in early life, had been Bishop of Wynton, forced, for lack of other heirs, to take upon himself the crown. In his days did Almighty God bring in folk most cruel, who spared neither age nor sex, Dacians [Danes] to wit, and Goths, Norwegians and Swedes, Vandals and Frisians, who from the beginning of this reign, even unto the coming of William, Duke of Normandy, wasted England.

§ 4. This King Ethelwolf made over to God and Holy Church every tenth hide of land throughout all Wessex, free from all secular service, for feeding and clothing the poor and needy and

1 This is the earliest example of that loose use of the word 'British,' as equivalent to 'Ancient English,' which in popular use continued even into the nineteenth century.

2 For the real events here travestied, see Introductory Sketch, Chapter II.

the sick. Afterwards he went off to Rome, and made over to God and St. Peter, every year, from every house in all England, one penny; which, at this day, are commonly called Peter-pence. And he himself, of pure and heartfelt devotion to God, offered the first penny. None the less, did he afterwards, every year, make over to the Roman Church 300 talents; to wit, 100 for the lighting of St. Peter's, 100 for the lighting of St. Paul's, and 100 for the use of the High Pontiff. And after lingering for a whole year in the Roman Court, as he returned through France, he took to wife Judith, daughter of Charles the Bald, of whom he begat five sons, namely, Ethelbald, his firstborn, Ethelbert, the second, Ethelred, the third, Alured [Alfred], the fourth, and Adlestan [Athelstan], the fifth, who died in youth.[1]

§ 5. [The chronicle goes on to tell at great length the occasion of the Danish conquest of Northumbria, a tale similar to that concerning the Moorish invasion of Spain; and copies from Roger of Wendover (with acknowledgments, for a wonder) his dramatic version of the fall of East Anglia and the martyrdom of St. Edmund: and continue as follows:]

§ 6. After the slaughter of King Edmund, his brother Edwold, forsaking the delights of this world, for the ill luck that had befallen his brother and himself, took upon him the life of a hermit, on bread and water only, near the monastery of Carnelia [Cerne Abbey] in Dorset, beside that clear well which, of old, St. Augustine by his prayers made to spring forth, that he might baptize the folk therein.

§ 7. And thus was East Anglia brought under the Danes. And Ingwar returned to his brother Hubbe in Northumbria; and over East Anglia reigned first after Edmund a certain Dane named Godrim [Guthrum]. And on his way back he destroyed the Abbey of the holy maidens of Ely,[2] and the nuns that served God therein did he either cruelly slay or savagely drive forth. But the aforesaid Godrim was that Dane who made and sanctioned laws along with King Alfred.

§ 8. Anno Domini 869. The Danes went further, and brought under all Northumbria, and slew them that dwelt therein. And having there set wardens, they came into the realm of the Mercians, even unto Notyngham (which in Latin is called *Domus Spelun-*

[1] None of these were children of Judith, and Athelstan was the eldest. See Introduction.

[2] Ely was actually destroyed in the Great Danish raid of 870.

carum), and there for a whole year went into winter quarters. And there did Burred, the King, or Duke, of the Mercians, meet them, with the support and aid of his brother-in-law Ethelred, King of Wessex. And, inasmuch as the heathen, safe within the stronghold, refused battle, and the English could not breach the wall, peace was made on either side, and the Kings departed homeward. And the heathen sought again York, where they remained one whole year.

§ 9. In this year the city Alclud [Carlisle], so renowned of old, which is at the western end of the famous Wall [of Hadrian], was utterly blotted out by the Danes. And afterwards, leaving Mercia and Northumbria, they came, wasting the country, and destroying churches and monasteries, even unto Lincoln. And having taken and sacked it, and wasted all Holland and all Lindesey,[1] they passed over into East Anglia, and wintered at Thetford.

§ 10. Meanwhile the aforesaid Ethelbert, King of the West Saxons, who less than five years had worn the crown of the whole realm and reigned, ended this life, and is buried at Winchester. . . . And thereupon did Ethelred, a man devoted to God and dear to all around, succeed to the kingdom.

§ 11. Meanwhile the heathen host of the Dacians from Thetford, leaving East Anglia, under the leadership of Ingwar and Hubbe, as aforesaid, laying waste all towns and monasteries as they went, and harrying the country far and wide along their path, came into Wessex, even unto Reading. And there, on the third day of their coming, two of their chiefs, sallying forth after booty, were cut to pieces at Engelfelde. And, four days after, the West Saxons fell upon them, and made of the Danes no little slaughter. Yet did the Danes burst forth from their stronghold, and slew Ethelwulf, the Chieftain of Berkshire, and forced the English to fall back.

§ 12. Stirred by this shame, the English, after four days again, with their King, Ethelred, made them ready to battle against the Dacian King, Oseg by name, at Asschedon, which, being interpreted, signifies Ass Hill, or else Ash Hill. Now the King of Dacia had come with two Kings from overseas, and five Earls, and very many warriors. And he parted his host in twain; and the one part kept he for himself and the other Kings, and the other part gave he to the Earls. Likewise did King Ethelred part his

1 These are the southern and northern districts of Lincolnshire.

host in two equal bands; half kept he for himself, and the other left he to Alfred his brother. And when evening drew on, both sides laid them down to rest.

§ 13. But, when the morning was come, while King Ethelred heard his Mass, Alfred his brother was needs driven to bring up his host into battle. And so furiously did the Danes charge him, that little lacked there but that he was put to shame and flight. Then sent he in all haste for King Ethelred, who was yet hearing his Mass; and much did his prayer avail with God. But he, for his part, said Nay, never would he come while his Mass was unfinished. But when the Mass was duly celebrated, then hasted the aforesaid King, with all speed, unto the battle. And, albeit the Danes had seized the higher ground, he, with his Christians, charging up from beneath, brake his enemies. And with his own hand and spear slew he King Oseg, like a man, and with the sword girded on his thigh did he to death yet another King. And on that same day, in that fight, did the English cut to pieces five Danish Earls, with many a thousand foemen; and the rest, all that day and all that night, they chased even unto Reading.

§ 14. Yet, after 15 days, fought they at Basing, and the Danes had the victory. And thereafter, when two months were run, came they again together in battle at Merton; and the English had the worse, and the Danes the better. And then a certain Danish tyrant, Somerled by name,[1] drawing back from that place to Reading, laid waste there the town and whatsoever he might find there. Thereafter did Ethelred, King of the West Saxons, do battle with him; and, being mortally wounded, died, after great agony, the 9th Kal. May [April 22] in the fifth year of his reign. And to Wymborne was he brought for burial.

§ 15. When King Ethelred was dead, Alfred, his brother, who, up to this time, while his brothers yet lived, held but secondary rank, succeeded to the whole monarchy of the West Saxons, in the year A.D. 873. And, as it is written, he, first of all the Kings of England, was anointed at Rome, by Pope Leo. In this year, when he was but newly raised to the kingship, did the Danes follow hard upon him, even unto Merton in Sussex, and there came up to

[1] A curious misunderstanding of the A.S. Chronicle. 'There came no small summer-lead to Reading.'

him. And there fought they, and Alfred left them the field, and fled away to the greenwood. Yet thence did he pass into Wessex, and there gathered he the whole folk of his own realm, great and small. And, in short time, so great a force had he, what of his own men and what of others, that the Danes dared not to meet him in arms. So came he unto London, where they had sat them down; and there they besought of him peace; and, that they might barely get back to their own abode, without any betterment, offered they hostages, such as the English might chose them.

§ 16. Nevertheless, the self-same day that the hostages were taken, did the Danes depart from London, and ride all night long. And never drew they rein till they were come even so far as unto Exeter; and there took they the city, and abode therein. But when this was noised abroad, King Alfred hanged first the hostages, and hied him fast unto Exeter with his host. But the Danes, on hearing of his approach, left the town, and betook them to Chippenham in Wessex. And there did they many an evil deed; for so harried they the land, and so straitened they the folk, that they drave many a man from his own home.

§ 17. But King Alfred came there upon them, and right stoutly did he do battle with them. And in that fray was there slain Hubbe, the brother of Inguar, and Bruern Bocard[1] (who first, as has been said, brought in the Danes from Dacia). And many, on both sides, were there slain, and, at the last, had the Danes the better; for King Alfred had over-hastily made at them, and but small was his strength, and few his following. So from that field drew he off as best he might. And the Danes, when they found the corpse of Hubbe amongst the slain, buried it with mighty wailing, and heaped over it a mound, which they called Hubbelowe. Whence, to this day, that place is so called; and it is in the county of Devon.

§ 18. But after that the barons of the county of Somerset, and of Wilts, and of Dorset, heard of the ill-luck of Alfred their King, they came together, one and all, to the place where the King was,

1 This name is a corruption of Buzcarl or Butcarl (*i.e.* boatman), which we find in Gaimar. The legend was that Bruern, having treacherously murdered a Danish guest named Lodbroc in East Anglia, was sent adrift in an open boat by King Edmund. He got safe across the North Sea, and there persuaded the sons of Lodbroc, Ingwar and Hubba, that Edmund himself was their father's murderer, afterwards piloting them on their errand of vengeance.

with a very great power. And when they saw the King, whom they thought slain by their foes, in life and safety, they joyed and rejoiced with him; and took counsel together to follow up the Danes on the spot. So the King and the barons, with a very great host, rode after them all that night; and, on the morrow, at the ninth hour, came they upon those same Danes, who, as then, had taken post at Ethandune. And King Alfred and his men charged them full hotly, and stayed not, but set on; and harder was that fray than ought they had known erewhile. But so manfully did the Danes keep their stand against the English, that no man could judge on which side was indeed the greater slaughter. And thus the English (though not without great loss to their foes) were grievously brought low by 8 battles in one year, and waxed few in number.

§ 19. In this year the English made peace with the Danes, on this troth, that the Danes should depart from them. Which also they did; swearing, moreover, that never would they wage fight or war [*bellum aut guerram*] against him [Alfred] in his own land. And that year wintered they in London, and the next in Lyndseye; and the Mercians made peace with them.

§ 20. But in the third year the Danes brake the peace made with the Mercians, and passed from Lyndseye to Ripendon [Repton], and drave out Burred, King of the Mercians. And his kingdom gave they to one Colwolf, a thane of Burred's, to hold under them; on this troth, that, whensoever they would, they should have it again. Thus, three years after, they divided that realm among them; and part they gave to Colwolf (who was also the last of the Mercian Kings). And, after his death, Alfred, King of the West Saxons, added, first London, and afterwards all Colwolf's part, to his own kingdom.

§ 21. In the year of the Lord 875, in which the aforesaid Burred, King of Mercia, was driven out by the Danes, the men of Hambury [Hanbury], about five miles from Ripendon [Repton], moved by fear, translated unto Cestria (Chester),[1] as unto a place of safety, the body of the holy virgin Wereburga, which had long been buried

[1] Chester was at this time waste, so that this translation cannot have taken place at this date. But it is an actual fact that St. Werburga was so translated, and buried in the south transept of Chester Cathedral, which is still dedicated to her. She was daughter of Ermenilda, the first Christian Queen of Mercia, and thus niece to St. Etheldred of Ely.

there. And in this year did Rollo, a Dane or Norwegian by race (who, afterwards, conquered Normandy, and was the first duke there), come to England with his mates, and started to harry the land. And in battle with the English were many of his men slain, and the rest ran away.

§ 22. And at night, as Rollo slept, there seemed him that a swarm of bees flew quickly over him and his host, and hummed off southward, and flew over the mid-sea, and so came to land. And there drew they together, and settled on the leaves of divers trees, and, in short time, filled they all that land, and began to bring together unto one place flowrets of many a hue. Here woke Rollo, and thought on that dream, and the interpretation thereof. And when he had diligently considered the thing, he guessed that he might find rest from his toil in those parts where the bees had settled. So crossed he the sea, and put to shore in Normandy; where Franco, Archbishop of Rothomagus [Rouen], having small faith in his power to resist, besought peace. Having thus gained the sway, he came to Rouen, and repaired the walls, and built him castles all about, and had under him the land of Neustria, which now is called Normandy, and was made the first Duke there. And afterwards the aforesaid Archbishop Franco baptized him.

§ 23. King Alfred entered into treaty with the Danes, and hostages were given. But the Danes, thinking naught of their oaths, one night slew all the King's horsemen. This stirred the King, and he chased them even unto Exeter, where again hostages were given, and troth plighted; and there stayed they a whole year. But the Danes from Wareham, in sailing to their friends at Exeter, lost their ships by a storm at sea. Yet did part of them take the royal town of Chippenham, with the land thereby; and many thereabout did they enthral, or else exile.

§ 24. And in this stress, in the year of our Lord 877, the fifth of his reign, did this same King Alfred, with but few beside him, lead, in the parts of Somerset, a homeless, restless, life, insomuch that he had nought whereon to live, save what he might get by raiding, or hunting, or fishing. . . .

[Here follows the tale of St. Cuthbert's appearance to Alfred.]

He built him a stronghold at Ethelynghey [Athelney], which, by interpretation, is *The Isle of Peers.* Oft warred he on his foes, and specially about Selewode (which, being interpreted, is the *Great Wood*): insomuch that at last he took their noblest as

hostages. And Godrin [Guthrum], the Dacian King, with many another high and mighty chieftain, did Alfred uplift from the sacred font, giving him the name of Athelstan, and making unbounded peace with him. So that afterwards . . . he and King Alfred stablished laws together. . . .

This same King Alfred, when Tunbert, Bishop of Winchester, died, set over the see Denewolf, whom, when he was in hiding, he had found in the woods, a cowherd and layman; but perceiving his good wit, he made him, old as he was, to be instructed in letters.

§ 25. In the year 879 (the 7th of Alfred's reign), did the Dacian host as they had promised him, leave the cities of Chippenham and Cirencester, which are to the south of the Hwiccas,[1] and betook themselves to East Anglia. And with the rest of that host there banded them a great Dacian host from foreign parts, chased out of France by King Charles, at Fullenham [Fulham]. And, in that same year, King Alfred repaired the city of Sepronia, that is Shaftesbury, as witnesseth the great stone which is yet in the Chapterhouse of the nuns, with its inscription. And the Danes who returned from France laid siege to Rochester, and built them a work over against the gate. But the townsfolk withstood them, until Alfred came upon them, and took the horses of the Danes, and put them to flight, so that at once they sought again France. Yea, and the King sent his fleet, all filled with warriors, from Kent to East Anglia, and took the Danish ships there. Yet in the way back was the royal fleet worsted. But the Danes, oaring up the water of Seine, laid siege to Paris. . . .

§ 26. In the 15th year of his reign, this same Alfred, after the many burnings of the city and massacres of the townsfolk, repaired London, that men might dwell therein, and made it over to one Ethelred, Chieftain of the Mercians, along with Elfleda his own daughter. And at that time all the English that were scattered abroad came, and, with one accord, did homage to King Alfred. . . . About the same time did the Earl of Wilton bear to Rome the alms of King Alfred: and Swithelm, Bishop of Schireburn [Sherborne] bear the same to St. Thomas in India. And they came back home unhurt.

[1] The Hwiccas were the Saxon sept dwelling in Worcestershire and Gloucestershire. Tewkesbury is named from them.

§ 27. In the 18th year of his reign, this King Alfred built two famous monasteries, one at Athelney for monks, and the other at Shaftesbury for nuns, over which he set his own daughter Elgiva as Abbess. In the same year the aforesaid King Guthrum, also called Athelstan, died. And in this year came there against King Alfred four several hosts; one in Northumbria, another in East Anglia, a third at Exeter, and a fourth at Leicester [Chester]. And so straitly were they besieged, that they devoured their very horses for hunger.

§ 28. In the 21st year of King Alfred three men of Scotland[1], Dublan, Malicon, and Malinuryn, minding to lead, for Christ's sake, a pilgrim life, took with them victuals for one week; and made them a boat of two hides and a half, and entered therein. And, in wondrous wise, without sail or gear, after seven days, came they to shore in Cornwall, and afterwards went up to King Alfred. And Plegmund, Archbishop of Canterbury, a right noble man of letters, received his pall from Pope Formosus, and in the 22nd year of King Alfred, consecrated he seven bishops in one day.

§ 29. In this year King Alfred, leaving half his host in divers strongholds, and with the other half going forth to battle, drave out the Danes first from Kent, then from Exeter, and, thirdly, from Chichester. Thence did the Danes come unto the City of the Legions, which in English is called Chester, where, after three days' siege, by force of hunger left the city, and harried North Wales, and thus fetched a compass through Northumbria to Mersey, an island in Essex, and got back to East Anglia, where were their wives and their ships. And afterwards, in the winter, they towed their ships through the Thames into the river of Lea. But that host which had besieged Exeter was caught harrying near Chichester, whereby they lost many of their men, and several ships.

§ 30. But, in the next year, the host which was on the Lea wrought them a stronghold, 20 miles from London. But the Londoners, by the aid of Alfred, brake it down, and slew four of their leaders, and divided the river Lea into three branches, so that their ships could not be brought out. And when the Danes saw that, they left there their ships; and strengthening a certain hold

1 *I.e.* Ireland, the original home of the Scots.

near Brugges [Bridgenorth] on the Severn, therein wintered. And while King Alfred pursued them with his army, the Londoners brought round some of the ships forsaken in the Lea to London, and some they burnt to ashes. So in these three aforesaid years, since the Danes came in by the harbour of Lymnemouth, the English underwent no small distress, not only through being infested by these Dacians, but also by mortality amongst men, and plague amongst cattle. But after this, in the fourth year, the Danish host brake up, partly to Northumbria, partly to East Anglia; and part crossed the Channel to Seine-mouth. . . .

[Here follows the naval battle of 897 from the A.S. Chronicle (p. 131).]

§ 31. And here think I it worth while to insert somewhat concerning this famous King Alfred, with his winsome presence: of his beginning, his progress, and his end. Beloved was he by both father and mother beyond all his brethren; whence he abode in his father's court, up to 12 years of age, without knowing his letters; though the boy learnt by heart many a Saxon song. Ever was he foremost in the hunt; and wrote up his psalms and prayers in a little book which he ever bare about with him. Yet but little knew he of Grammar, seeing that in all the West, as at that time, not one teacher of Grammar could be found.

§ 32. Therefore, by counsel of the blessed Abbot, St. Neot, whom he oftentimes visited, he founded at Oxford[1] public schools of divers Arts, and granted unto them many privileges. For the same cause also, did this same great King, the Giver of Alms, the Hearer of Masses, the Seeker into things unknown, call to him Grimbald, a monk of Gaul, well skilled in letters and in song, and John [Scotus], and Asser, a monk of the Abbey of St. David in Menevia, in the utmost parts of Wales, that from them he might learn the more of Letters. His nobles, moreover, so provoked he to Letters, that, of themselves, did they in turn give over to this study each man his son, or, if he had no son, then, at least, his thrall. And he made Werfrith, the Bishop of Worcester, to translate into the Saxon tongue the book of Boecius *De Consolatione Philosophiæ*, and the *Dialogues* of the Blessed Gregory. Most carefully, moreover, did he look into the doings of his thanes, and, more especially, his judges; insomuch that

[1] See Introduction, IX., § 5.

those whom he found to err through avarice or ignorance, them he put away from their post.

§ 33. Now, although it has been said above that, in the time of this King Alfred, in all Wessex was there none who taught Letters, yet, before his time, in other parts of the realm (in the City of Legions, to wit, in South Wales, now called Karleonn), were there astrologers and philosophers of universal erudition; as Walter of Monmouth, in his book, *The Coming of King Arthur*, has shown clearly enough. Afterwards also, in the time of King Egbert, of Kent, the island was the very home of philosophy.

§ 34. Whence, about that time (as some hold, and as is the common tale both of ancients and moderns), it is believed that a University[1] was founded, by the Venerable Bede, at Grantecestre near Cambridge.[2] And this may be very likely, because and because [*pro eo et ex eo*] that afterwards, in the time of Charlemagne, King of France, Alcuin of England, a disciple of Bede, well skilled in all Letters, is said to have translated a University from Rome even unto Paris.[3] . . . Also Erpwald,[4] King of East Anglia, son of King Redwald, set up, with the help of St. Felix, schools for boys, such as he had seen in Gaul, when in exile there before he became King.

§ 35. But some there are who say that already, before this time, there were two Universities in England, one for Latin and the other for Greek: of which the Grecians founded one at Greek-lade (which is now called Cricklade), and there for a while taught they the Greek tongue. But the Latins founded the other at Latin-lade (which is now Lechlade), near Oxford, and there they taught Latin. . . .

§ 36. [The writer here traces the origin of Universities, through Rome and Athens, to Egypt, 'where Abraham was the first to teach the Quadrivium' (the higher fourfold course of (1) Arithmetic, (2) Geometry, (3) Harmony, and (4) Astronomy, which succeeded the 'trivial' study of Latin Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric, in the thirteenth century curriculum). 'Under so great a Doctor they made rapid progress in Mathematics,' and handed on their knowledge to 'Pythagoras, Plato, and the other philosophers.' He then returns to his subject.]

1 *Studium*, the oldest term for *University*, which latter name came up in the fourteenth century. This passage must therefore be of the thirteenth century, early in which Cambridge was founded.

2 Bede mentions that Cambridge (which he calls Grantchester) was lying waste in his day ('Eccles. Hist.,' iv. 19).

3 The University of Paris was actually founded early in the twelfth century.

4 A mistake for Sigbert, who reigned 631-637.

§ 37. Of this King Alfred it is written, that, when he was a youth, and would fain stablish his heart in the Commandments of God, but could not because of the infirmity of the flesh . . . he was ever seeking the temples of the Saints, morning, noon, and night, beseeching God to scourge him with some thorn in the flesh, which, while not disabling him for earthly duties, might yet dispose him the more diligently to serve Him. The Lord granted him; and such a thorn . . . he bare for many years, wherefrom he endured such misery that he went to Cornwall, and visited the Church of St. Gueryr, where St. Neot now rests, and prayed God to assuage, or at least change, his plague. Some, however, say that he was cured [*curatus*] by St. Modwenna,[1] an Irish virgin. Yet when his wish was gained, a yet more grievous disease affected him, from his 20th even to his 45th year. Thus were there born unto him, by Elswitha his Queen, two sons, Edward, surnamed the Elder, and Ethelward, and three daughters, Elfleda [Ethelfled], Lady of the Mercians, Elgiva, a nun, and Elfrida, all of whom he had well taught in the Liberal Arts.

[Here follows Asser's account of Alfred's management of his property and time.]

§ 38. And, howbeit 'amid arms laws be still,' King Alfred, amid all the clash of weapons, was a law-giver. And he instituted the Centuries, which men call Hundreds, and the Decuries, which they call Tithings; and kept the peace amongst his folk; and so put down thieves, that, in the cross ways, he bade hang golden bracelets, to mock the greed of wayfarers, for none dare lay hand on them.

§ 39. Now when this King Alfred had brought all his designs to happy issue, and for 28½ years had reigned over all England (save those parts which were under the Danes), he felt the sting of death at Winchester, and died; and there, in the New Monastery, is he buried.

[1] St. Modwenna probably lived about A.D. 700. Alfred may possibly have visited her shrine at Killevy in Armagh. But it is more likely that the tale arose through a confusion of his name with that of her friend Aldfrid of Northumbria. (See Arnold-Foster, 'Church Dedications.' vol. ii, pp. 157, 385, 415.)

XII.

THE CHRONICLE OF CROWLAND.

COMMONLY KNOWN AS 'INGULF.'

THIS chronicle was for long believed to be the actual work of the author in whose name it is written, Ingulf, the famous Abbot of Crowland, or Croyland, under William the Conqueror. Various anachronisms (*e.g.* references to Philip Augustus of France, and to the University of Oxford) have convinced modarn critics that it is a fourteenth-century production. But it is certainly no mere invention of that century, the writer having used earlier material. He has, for example, embodied the notice of Crowland found in Ordericus Vitalis (1112); and his account of the sack of the abbey by the Danes bears every mark of being also from some contemporary source.

No ancient MS. of this chronicle has survived, though such are mentioned by the historians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was edited by Saville, 1596, and by Gale a century later. A translation is given in 'The Church Historians of England.'

The following are the extracts given:

SECTION

1. Of Bertulf, King of Mercia.
2. Of Ethelwulf, King of Wessex.
3. Of Ethelbald his son.
4. Of the Danes at Nottingham.
5. Of the Danes at Lindesey.
6. How Earl Algar fought with the Danes.

SECTION

11. How the Danes sacked Crowland and Peterborough.
21. How the Danes sacked Ely.
22. Of Burghred, King of Mercia.
23. Of King Alfred in Athelney.
24. Of Ceolwolf, King of Mercia.
25. Of the goodness of King Alfred, and of his death.

THE CHRONICLE OF CROWLAND.

§ 1. [A.D. 838] Bertulf succeeded to the kingship [of Mercia], and reigned 13 years. . . . A wicked man he was, and, as he passed through Crowland, laid hands on all the many jewels wherewith . . . other Kings of Mercia had adorned that holy church—yea, and on all the money he could find in the monastery. Therewith raised he a force to war against the Danes, who, as then, were ravening around London. And by these Heathen was he worsted and put to flight. [A.D. 850.] . . .

[Here follows a spurious charter of King Bertwulf's.]

§ 2. [A.D. 855] God wrought a signal miracle to the glory of His holy Confessor, St. Guthlac [the founder of Crowland, A.D. 714] . . . so that the Abbot Siward . . . having been tried, like the blessed Job, by deepest poverty, and despoiled of his whole Abbey treasure, even unto the uttermost farthing . . . received the double for all his loss. . . . His old age, moreover, became still more prosperous by yet another means. For Ethelwulf, the far-famed King of the West Saxons, being but newly come back from Rome (whither he had gone, in deep devotion, along with Alfred, his youngest son, to visit the threshold of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and His Holiness Pope Leo) . . . then first endowed the whole Church of England with the tithes of all the land . . . by charter. [Here follows the charter, again spurious.] And this charter did King Ethelwulf, for the more surety, offer upon the altar of Peter the Apostle. And the Bishops . . . sent it to every church in each diocese to be published.

§ 3. This year Bertulf King of the Mercians, after a reign of thirteen years died, and after him Burghred took the kingdom. . . . At this time Ethelwulf, King of the West Saxons, likewise died, and his sons, Ethelbald and Ethelbert, shared the kingdom between them. The first of these . . . took to wife his own stepmother, Judith . . . wherethrough all folk were overcome with abhorrence at such enormity of wickedness. After two years thus wallowing in the mire he died, and Ethelbert . . . undauntedly, for five years, held the kingdom. Then was Ethelred, the third brother, raised to the throne.

§ 4. In his days waxed the woes of warfare utterly unbearable. On every side the Heathen burst in. Northumbria had they raided,

had taken York, had harried East Anglia, had fallen upon Mercia; and at Nottingham were they now wintering, in the year of our Lord 866 [868]. Against them did King Burghred raise a great force, and, being strengthened also by that of Ethelred, King of the West Saxons, and his brother Alfred (for he had wedded their sister), he made the Heathen to quit Nottingham and go back unto York. In this campaign did Earl Algar the Younger show himself a mighty man of valour, and thereby was held in high honour of King Burghred and his brethren of Wessex. Good friend, moreover, was he to our Abbey of Crowland. . . .

§ 5. But in the next year [869], as soon as winter was gone, the Heathen had crossed over by ship into Lindesey [Northern Lincolnshire] . . . and laid waste all that land. Now harried they the monastery of Bardney, of old renown, and slew every monk there in the church, without pity. All that summer consumed they the land to ashes; and, about Michaelmas, entered Kesteven [South-western Lincolnshire]; and wasted, and slew, and gave unto the flames all that was therein.

§ 6. At length, in the year of the Incarnation of our Lord 870, in the month of September . . . there gathered together unto Earl Algar the whole youth of Holland [South-eastern Lincolnshire], along with a band from Crowland Abbey, 200 sturdy warriors, . . . led on by Tolius, a lay brother of that House, who, before his conversion, had been a champion of fame throughout all Mercia. . . . Besides these there gathered also, from Deeping, Langtoft, and Boston, some 300 valiant men, and, over all, Morcar, Lord of Bourn, with his household, many and brave. The Sheriff of Lincoln, also, Osgot by name, came in with the men of Lincoln, 500 strong. All these gat them together unto Kesteven; and, on the Feast of St. Maurice the Martyr [September 22], waged battle against the Heathen. And, by the gift of God, theirs was the victory. Three Kings of the foemen were there slain, and of the Host an untold number, and the Christians chased and cut down the savages even to the doors of their tents. There did the Danes make a desperate stand; and nightfall put an end to the fight, and the victorious Earl drew off his army.

§ 7. Throughout that night came there into the Heathen camp from the country round (whither they had raided forth, each in his allotted share) all the rest of their Kings—Guthrum, to wit, and

Baseg, and Oskytel, and Halfdene, and Hammond; and the like number of Earls—Frena, to wit, and Ingwar, and Hubba, and the two Sidrocs, elder and younger; along with their hosts, and untold spoil, and many a [captive] woman and many a child. No sooner was their coming known, than the most of the Christians fled away, panic-stricken, that same night, and of 8,000 men there abode with Earl Algar but 2,000. Yet were all of these ready to die for Christ and Country; they heard Divine Service, they received the Holy Viaticum; and, at dawn, went they forth into the field.

§ 8. The dauntless Earl, seeing his army in evil case, placed brother Tolius and his 500 on the right, as before . . . giving him also . . . Morcar of Bourn with his followers. Osgot, the renowned Sheriff of Lincoln, placed he on the left, . . . with Harding of Ryhall, and all the men of Stamford; and a brave and warrior youth they were. Mad were the Danes at the slaughter of their men; and very early in the morning they buried their three Kings in the town which of yore was called Laundon, but now, from these same three Kings, is called Threekingham [between Sleaford and Bourn].

§ 9. So few were the Christians that they drew together and formed one troop, in shape like unto a wedge, and all day long stood they firm and still, holding their firm wall of shields against the foemen's arrow-flight, and there dense line of spears against the wild charges of the horse. So stood they unbroken even until nightfall; spent were the foemen's shafts; worn out were their horsemen with long toils. Then, at an afore-planned signal, made they as though to flee, and turned them from the field. Whereon the Christians, at this sight, despite of the word of command, and all their leaders could do or say, broke line, and scattered all over the field, chasing the Heathen, in unordered throng, and leaderless.

§ 10. Then did the savages turn again, and fell upon them, even as raging lions upon sheep. . . . But, when the valiant Earl Algar and the above-named leaders saw that the best of their army were fallen, then made they one dash altogether to where the Christian corpses lay heaped up the thickest. And there to the uttermost of their strength avenged they their blood on all who drew nigh; till at length, pierced with countless wounds, upon the bodies of their brethren fell they, one and all. Hardly did a few

young men of Sutton and of Gedney make off, casting away their arms, to a neighbouring wood, and in the following night came unto the monastery of Crowland. There found they Theodore the Abbot and his convent at Mattins,[1] and even while the office was saying, entered they the church door, and with weeping and wailing told their tidings—how that the Christians were slaughtered, and brother Tolius with them, and all his whole band utterly cut off.

§ 11. At this news all was confusion. And the Abbot, keeping with himself the oldest of the monks, and a few of the children [of the Abbey School] . . . bade all those in their prime to take along with them the sacred relics of the monastery (namely the holy body of St. Guthlac, his scourge, and his psalter), and the other chief treasures, . . . and thus to flee into the neighbouring fens. . . . With sorrow of heart did they his bidding, and, having laden a boat with the aforesaid relics and the charters of the Kings, they cast into the cloister well the frontal of the High Altar (which was covered with plates of gold), along with ten chalices . . . and other vessels. But the end of the frontal, so long was it, always showed above the water; whereupon they drew it out and left it with the Abbot; for ever could they see the flames of the towns in Kesteven draw nigher and nigher, and feared lest the Heathen should on a sudden burst in upon them. So took they boat, and came unto the wood of Ancarig [Thorney], on the southern march of their islet. And here abode they with Brother Toretus, an anchorite, and other brethren, then dwelling there, four days, thirty in all, of whom ten were priests. But the Abbot, and two old men with him, hid the aforesaid frontal outside the church, to the north; and afterwards he and all the rest, clad in their sacred vestments, met in choir, and kept the Hours of Divine Service according to their Rule. And the whole of the Psalms of David went they through from end to end. After this sang they High Mass, the Abbot himself being Celebrant. . . .

§ 12. Now, when the Mass was drawing to an end, and the Abbot and his deacon and sub-deacon and the taper-bearers had already communicated in the Holy Mysteries, came the Heathen bursting into the church. And upon the very Altar, by the cruel hand of King Oscytel, was the venerable Abbot himself sacrificed, a true martyr and victim of Christ. All they who stood round and

1 The Midnight Service of the Breviary.

ministered with him were beheaded by the savages; and the aged men and children, as they fled from the choir, were taken and questioned under the bitterest tortures, to make them show the treasures of the church. Dom[1] Asker, the Prior, was slain in the vestry, and Dom Lethwyn, Sub-prior, in the refectory. Behind him there followed close Brother Turgar,[2] a ten year child, shapely, and of a fair countenance; who, when he saw his Superior slain, besought earnestly that he too might be slain with him. But Earl Sidroc the Younger, touched with pity for the lad, stripped him of his cowl, and gave him a Danish cloak [*collobio*], bidding him follow everywhere his steps. And thus, out of all who abode in the monastery, old and young, he alone was saved; coming and going amongst the Danes throughout all his sojourn amongst them, even as one of themselves, throngh this Earl's favour and protection.

§ 13. Now when all the monks had been done to death by the torturers, and no whit of the Abbey treasures shown thereby, the Danes, with spades and ploughshares, brake open right and left all the sepulchres of the Saints round about that of St. Guthlac. On the right was that of St. Cissa, priest and anchorite, and of St. Bettelin, a man of God, erst an attendant on St. Guthlac, and of Dom Siward [the Abbot] of blessed memory. And on the left was that of St. Egbert, St. Guthlac's scribe and confessor, and of St. Tatwin, the pilot who guided St. Guthlac to Crowland. . . . All these did the savages burst open, looking to find treasure therein. And finding none, they were filled with indignation; and piling up all these holy bodies on a heap, in piteous wise, they set fire to them, and, on the third day after their coming, that is to say, on the 7th of the Kalends of October [September 25], they utterly consumed them, church and monastery and all.

§ 14. But on the fourth day off they went, with countless droves of beasts and pack-horses, to Medehampstead [Peterborough]. And there, dashing at the outer precinct [*primam collectam*] of the monastery, with its barred gates, they assailed the walls on every side with arrows and machines. At the second assault the Heathen brake in, and in the very breach Tubba, the brother of Earl Hubba, fell grievously wounded by a stone-cast. By the hands of his

[1] *Dominus* is thus abbreviated amongst Benedictines.

[2] This name appears in Thurgar-ton, Northamptonshire.

guards he was borne into the tent of Hubba his brother, and despaired even of life. Then did Hubba's rage boil over, and he was altogether wild against the monks, so that he slew with his own hand every soul clad in the religious habit; the rest sprang upon the rest; not one in the whole monastery was saved; both the venerable Abbot Hedda, and all his monks, and all the lay-brethren [*comprimoti*] were massacred; and Brother Turgar was warned by his master Earl Sidroc never anywhere to cross the path of Earl Hubba. Every altar was uprooted [*suffossa*] every monument broken in pieces, the great library of holy books burnt, the plenteous store of monastic papers scattered to the winds; the precious relics [*pignora*] of the holy virgins Kineburgh, Kinswith, and Tibba,[1] trodden under foot; the walls utterly overthrown; the buildings burnt up, church and all, blazing with a bright flame for five whole days after.

§ 15. Then on the fourth day the Host drew together, with spoil beyond tale from all the country round, and set off towards Huntingdon. The two Sidroc Earls, at the crossing of the rivers, ever came last, to guard the rear [*caudam*] of the whole army. Now all their host had passed over the river Nene safely; but as they were themselves crossing they had the bad luck to lose two carts, laden with untold wealth and plenishing, which sank in a deep eddy of the stream to the left of the stone bridge, so that horses and all were drowned before they could be got out. And while the whole household of Earl Sidroc the Younger was busied in drawing out these same carts, and in transferring the spoil to other waggons and carriages, Brother Turgar slipped away and fled to the neighbouring forest. All night did he walk, and, with the earliest dawn, came into Crowland. There he found his fellow monks, who had got back from Thorney the day before, and were hard at work putting out the fires which still had the mastery in many of the ruins of the monastery.

§ 16. And when they saw him safe and sound they were somewhat comforted; but on hearing from him where their Abbot and the other Superiors and Brethren lay slain, and how all the sepulchres of the Saints were broken down, and all the monuments,

1 Kineburgh and Kinswith were sisters of Wulfhere, the first Christian King of Mercia. Tibba is usually identified with St. Ebba of Coldingham, but more probably was a local saint.

and all their holy books and all the sacred bodies burnt up, all were stricken with grief unspeakable; and long was the lamentation and mourning that was made. Satiated at length with weeping they turned again to putting out the conflagration. And when they raised the ruins of the church roof about the High Altar, they found the body of their venerable father and abbot Theodore, beheaded, stripped, half-burnt, and bruised and crushed into the earth by the fallen timbers. This was on the eighth day after his murder, and a little away from the spot where he was slaughtered. And the other Ministers, who fell with him, found they in like manner, crushed into the ground by the weight of the beams—all save Wulfric the taper-bearer.

§ 17. But not all at once. For the bodies of some of the Brethren were not found till half a year after their martyrdom, and not in the places where they were slain. For Dom Paulinus and Dom Herbert, very old men, and decrepit, whose hands were cut off and themselves tortured to death in the Choir, were found, after diligent search, not there but in the Chapterhouse. In like manner Dom Grimketyl and Dom Egmund, both some hundred years old, who had been thrust through with swords in the Cloister, were found in the Parlour [*locutorium*]. And the rest too, both children and old men, were sought for in divers places, even as Brother Turgar told just how each had been slain; and at last were all found, with many a doleful plaint and many a tear, save Wulfric only. And Dom Brickstan, once the Precenter of the monastery, a most skilful musician and poet, who was amongst the survivors, wrote on the ashes of Crowland that Lament, which is so well known, and begins thus:

> 'Desolate how dost thou sit, who late was Queen among Houses;
> Church so noble of old; erst so beloved of God.'
>
> [Quomodo sola sedes, dudum regina domorum
> Nobilis ecclesia, et nuper amica Dei.]

§ 18. Now when the monastery, after long and hard work, was cleared out, and cleansed, so far as was then possible, from filth and ashes, they took counsel on choosing them a Pastor; and when the election was held, the venerable Father Godric, though much against his will, was made Abbot. To him came that venerable old man Toretus, the Prior of Thorney, and his Sub-prior, Dom Tissa, both anchorites of the utmost sanctity. And devoutly they

prayed him that he would deign to take with him certain Brethren and come to Peterborough, and give, of his charity, Christian burial to the bodies of their Abbot and the other Brethren, which yet remained unburied and exposed to beasts and birds. The Abbot gave heed unto their prayer, and with many of the Brethren (amongst them Brother Turgar) came unto Peterborough, where all the Brethren of Thorney met him. And with much labour the bodies of all the monks of that monastery were got together, 84 by tale, and buried in one wide grave in the midst of the Abbey cemetery, over against what was once the East End of the Church. This was on St. Cecilia's day [November 22].

§ 19. And over the body of the Abbot, as he lay amid his children, he placed a three-sided stone, three feet high, and three long, and one broad, bearing carved likenesses of the Abbot, and his monks standing around him. And this stone, in memory of the ruined abbey, bade he thenceforward be called Medehampstead. And once in every year, while he lived, did he visit it; and, pitching his tent above the stone, said Mass for two days with instant devotion for the souls of those there buried.

§ 20. Through the midst of that cemetery there ran the King's highway [*via regia*]; and this stone was on the right thereof, as one comes up from the aforesaid stone bridge towards Holland; and on the left stood a stone cross bearing a carven image of the Saviour; which our Abbot Godric then set there, to the intent that travellers who passed by might be mindful of that holy Abbey, and pray to the Lord for the souls of the Faithful who lay in that cemetery. . . .

§ 21. Meanwhile the Heathen harried the whole district, even unto Cambridge, and gave to the flames the far-famed Abbey of nuns in the island of Ely, after cruelly slaying all they found therein, both maidens and men, and sharing amongst their savage hordes the cattle and the untold wealth brought in thither for safety from all the country round. . . .

[Here follows a short notice of the fall of East Anglia and the death of St. Edmund; also of the invasion of Wessex and the Battle of Ashdown.]

§ 22. Meanwhile Burghred, King of Mercia, was engaged with the Britons, who were harrying the West of his realm by raid after raid. But when he heard of the cruel mischief the Danes had wrought him in the East, then came he soon to London, and

gathered a mighty host, and passing through the eastern part of his kingdom, seized for his privy purse the whole Isle of Ely . . . and all the lands of Peterborough Abbey. And the outlying portions he gave to his mercenaries. And so did he with the lands of the Abbey of St. Pega at Peakirk, and even those of St. Guthlac at Crowland; some gave he to his mercenaries, and some confiscated he for himself. . . . And passing with his army into Lindesey, he did the like with the wide tract lately belonging to Bardney Abbey. . . .

§ 23. [The death of Ethelred is here mentioned, and the accession of Alfred, his struggle with the Danes and his straits in Athelney. The vision of St. Cuthbert follows, with the story of Alfred, as a minstrel, spying on the Danes; the victory of Ethandune; and the baptism of Guthrum, 'to whom the King, as his Godfather, gave East Anglia, that is, Norfolk.' Next we read of the destruction by the Danes of the Abbey of Repton, 'that far-famed burial-place of all the Kings of Mercia'; and of the exile and death of Burghred.]

§ 24. Him there followed in the kingship one of his thanes, Ceolwulf, set up by the Danes, of English blood, but impious as any savage. For he had sworn to the Danes that he would truly pay such tribute as they laid on him, and would give up quiet and peaceable possession of the kingdom whensoever they demanded it. Therefore all about the land did he flay the few surviving rustics, swallow up the tradesmen, oppress widows and orphans, and torture in divers manners the religious, if perchance they knew of treasure. . . . Even on the venerable Abbot Godric of Crowland and his miserable brethren did he lay a tax of £1,000, and all but brought the monastery to nothing. . . . For the Abbot, unable to support his monks, dispersed most of them abroad, to their relatives and other friends of the Abbey; and the few who abode with him dragged on their lives in the utmost need. Then were all the chalices of the Abbey, save three, and all the silver vessels (save the *Crucibolum* of King Withlaf),[1] and the other precious jewels [*jocalia*] either melted down into money or sold for money. And even so, scarce did it stay the ravenous glut of this petty kinglet Ceolwulf. He, however, at the last was deposed by his Danish masters (who herein for once did justice), and stripped stark naked, thus coming to a wretched end.

[1] King of Mercia, 826. What his *crucible* can have been is quite unknown. The word is connected not with *cross* but *crock*.

§ 25. [Alfred's defensive measures are next spoken of, his rule of life, and his literary work. After this we read of his political system, with its Hundreds, etc.; 'and the chief officers of the provinces, who were of old called Lord-Lieutenants [*vicedomini*], he made into two, namely Judges (whom we call Justices), and Sheriffs, who still bear that name.' The threefold division of his household is said to be, 'after the wit of David and Solomon.' His final victories of 894 are barely touched upon.]

Thus King Alfred the Alms-doer, who ever set his feet in all good ways, died, and was buried at Winchester.

XIII.

'THE BOOK OF HYDE.'

THIS book is a conglomerate of materials of various dates, put together in its present form probably towards the end of the fourteenth century, by some monk of Hyde Abbey (founded by Alfred). Some of these materials, *e.g.* the letter of Fulco, Archbishop of Rheims, to Alfred, may well be genuine; and the floating traditions of the House concerning its Founder, here given, are interesting.

The work begins with the Saxon conquest of Britain, and ends with the death of Edward the Elder.

No ancient MS. is known, nor has it ever been printed in full; but copious extracts are given by Griffith in his 'Annals of the Anglican Church' (1663); and a translation may be found in 'The Church Historians of England.'

The extracts here given are as follows:

SECTION

1. Of King Ethelwulf the Monk.
3. Of Ethelwulf and Alfred at Rome.
5. Of St. Modwenna.
6. Of King Alfred.
8. How Alfred sent for Grimbald.
9. What Archbishop Fulco wrote to Alfred.

SECTION

13. How Grimbald came to England, and of his discourse.
16. Of Alfred's schools.
17. Of his laws.
18. Of his valiancy.
20. Of his death and burial.
21. Of his son Edward.

'THE BOOK OF HYDE.'

§ 1. The illustrious Prince Egbert made over his son Athulf or Ethelwulf to be educated by Helmstane, the venerable prelate of the royal city of Winchester, by whose precepts his kingly heart was so bent that he gave up earthly royalty to win him a crown everlasting. Then was he advanced to the sub-diaconate, and at Winchester received the monastic tonsure, and was placed under St. Swithun, then Provost of the Old Monastery there. Thus when the glorious Prince Egbert . . . rested in the Lord, in a good old age . . . he left the kingdom without an heir, save for this son Ethelwulf, the humble and devout monk, vowed unto the Lord.

§ 2. England . . . thus lacking a ruler, the Lords and Bishops of the realm strove, with all their wit, to find him who they might choose over them. And He who aideth His servants who call upon Him in their need, put it into their heart to set up as King, with the Apostolic dispensation, this very Ethelwulf, monk and sub-deacon as he was. Instantly was an envoy sent to the Blessed Pope Leo,[1] to ask that . . . he might be crowned. And the Supreme Pontiff, considering how great and rueful would be the peril of England, if the Royal lineage were broken off, . . . bade them take Ethelwulf to King, dispensing him, under his own hand, from the sub-diaconate, and from his vow of Religion.

§ 3. Being thus raised to the throne, he took Alstan, Bishop of Sherborne, as his chief counsellor in affairs of state; but, in Church matters, St. Swithun; by whose counsel he made over to the Anglican Church a tenth of all his land for ever. . . .

[Here follows a laudation of the miracles worked by St. Swithun.]

§ 4. This same Ethelwulf had, by his wife Osburga, four famous sons, all, in turn, to reign after him; Ethelbald, Ethelbert, Ethelred, and Alfred, whom he loved beyond all the rest, and sent unto Pope Leo . . . to be anointed King of the English. . . . And this Ethelwulf repaired, at great cost, the Saxon School, which Ina, King of the West Saxons, had endowed. There also, seeing certain exiles doing public penance in chains, he obtained from the Pope that no English pilgrim should ever so do penance.

1 Gregory IV. was really Pope at Egbert's death.

And for this granted he a penny to St. Peter, year by year, from every dwelling house in his realm; besides three hundred marks yearly as Rome-scot.

[Here follows the marriage of Judith, and the rebellion of Ethelbald, abridged from Asser.]

§ 5. Ethelwulf also sent Alfred, his most Christian and best-beloved son, then sick of an incurable disease, to be healed by St. Modwenna, in Ireland. Later, when her church in Ireland was laid waste, Ethelwulf gave unto Modwenna . . . a convent at Polesworth, which flourisheth even to this day. And here abode St. Osyth, . . . and St. Edith, sister of King Ethelwulf.[1] . . .

[The reign of Ethelbald, Ethelbert, and Ethelred, 'whom Alfred, for his goodness, loved beyond all his brethren,' are next touched upon, and thus we reach the accession of Alfred.]

§ 6. King Alfred, that devoted, faithful, and pious Christian, now succeeded to the West Saxon kingship. Comely was he in presence, and . . . one of a thousand; sprung of British stock, and of noble Trojan blood.[2] . . . Foremost was he in the hunt; peerless as an architect; and ever bare he with him a volume which he called his Manual or Hand-book, wherein he had brought together Psalms and Prayers.

§ 7. Oft sought he to Neot the Abbot, and, by his counsel, set up public Schools of Arts. . . . Also called he to his court Grimbald, a monk skilled in Letters and Music, from France . . . and John [Scotus] . . . and Asser . . . from the ends of Wales . . . to 'teach his Senators wisdom' (Ps. civ. 22).

§ 8. For in the year of the Incarnation of our Lord 886 . . . the renowned King Alfred, having miraculously routed the Danes . . . gat the whole sway over all England. Then did it weigh upon his heart how Holy Church lay waste; priests murdered, monks cast forth, nuns dishonoured, ministers driven out; so that soon would the Christian Faith itself perish, and none be left

[1] St. Modwenna and her pupil St. Osyth, whose name (pronounced "Toosey") still survives as that of a village near Colchester, seem to have dwelt for awhile at Polesworth, in the seventh century. St. Edith, sister to King *Athelstan*, was there in the tenth century.

[2] This assertion is founded on a long pedigree, not wholly the same as tha in Asser, tracing Alfred to Woden, 'from whom the fourth day of the week is in the vulgar tongue [*barbare*] called Wodensday, and his wife Free, from whom the sixth day is called Freeday.' Nine generations earlier we come to 'Ebranc, who built the city of York.' . . . .

to partake of the Sacred Mysteries. So thought he on that spiritual bond of friendship wherein he had entered, as a boy, with St. Grimbald . . . of the Monastery of St. Bertin, where [on his way to Rome in 853] . . . he had daily sat at the feet of this best of teachers. . . . Thus came it to pass that . . . he spake of his holy man to Ethelred, Archbishop of Canterbury, . . . and both King and Bishop . . . sent over-sea . . . to pray the Abbot of St. Bertin he would send them Grimbald . . . to found a new monastery in the City of Winchester. . . . Messengers also did they send to Fulco, Archbishop of Rheims . . . who sent back this letter:

§ 9. 'Fulco, Archbishop of Rheims, Primate of the Franks, *Legatus Natus* of the Apostolic See, servant of the servants of God, to Alfred the Most Christian King of the English, wisheth ever both sway and triumph here, and the eternal joys of the Heavenly Kingdom.

'Since from our See, over which presideth St. Remigius,[1] the Apostle of the Franks, ye ask for counsel . . . this is not done without Divine impulse. And as of old the Frankish race learnt from St. Remigius . . . to worship the one true God, . . . so now doth the English nation seek to obtain from his See . . . one by whom they may be taught to avoid superstition . . . and violation of custom, . . . and may learn, in the Garden of the Lord, to pluck the flowers and to watch against the snake.

§ 10. 'For St. Augustine, the first Bishop of your race, sent forth by your Apostle, St. Gregory . . . thought not well to burden a barbarous folk with new and strange doctrines, for he knew how to say with the Apostle, *I have given you milk to drink, and not meat, seeing ye are babes in Christ.* . . . But, as time went on, Holy Church felt it neither her wish nor her duty to be content with this, . . . nor deemed it needless more thoroughly to edify the faithful, . . . whether she were stimulated by adversity or fostered by prosperity. . . .

'Hence the frequent calling of Councils, . . . hence sacred Canons, framed and hallowed by the Holy Ghost, . . . to be ignorant of which is, in cleric and priest above all, nothing short of wicked. Seeing this, . . . it hath seemed fit to Your Majesty . . . to consult our insignificance, and to seek to the See

1 Archbishop of Rheims *circa* 530, for seventy years.

of St. Remigius, which . . . hath ever excelled all the Churches of Gaul . . . in doctrine.

§ 11. 'And since ye would not appear before us . . . empty-handed, . . . ye have sent us a gift of well-bred dogs, . . . to drive away the wolves wherewith . . . our land aboundeth; asking of us in return to send you certain watch-dogs, . . . not *Dumb dogs, unable to bark*, but such as the Psalmist speaketh of, *That the tongue of thy dogs may be red*, who . . . may drive away those fell wolves, the unclean spirits, who devour souls. And, in special, ye ask Grimbald, . . . to whom the whole church beareth witness from his childhood. . . . Not without deep sorrow (forgive us for the word) . . . do we suffer him to be torn from us.

§ 12. 'But as Charity knoweth nought of loss, nor Faith of harm, and no distance can indeed part those whom unfeigned love bindeth in one, . . . we grudge him not to you. . . . For we know that . . . the Catholic and Apostolic Church is One, whether it be at Rome, or beyond the sea.'

§ 13. Thus did Grimbald, after the example of the patriarch Abraham, depart from his country and his father's house, and come into England, where he became a great nation . . . of many spiritual children. And they received him . . . as an angel of God. And King Alfred . . . called together at London, which is the metropolis of the whole island, a Council of the Bishops and Abbots and the best of all England. And when they met there, old and young, then sang they anthems to Christ, and took sweet counsel together. And with grave dignity did the holy Grimbald speak unto them thus:

§ 14. [Here follows Grimbald's sermon on 'the eight prime sources of pollution' (Pride, Gluttony, Drunkenness, Impurity, Robbery, Murder, Lying and Avarice), and the 'eight chief virtues contrary to them.' His exordium dwells on the creation by God of all things, visible, and invisible such as angels, who, if we live well, shall be our fellow-citizens. . . . And us He made after His own image and similitude; wherefore we ourselves are not able to comprehend ourselves . . . If we discern not this excellence of our nature, then shall we be lower than the beasts. For in each one of us are these two things, Will and Power.'] . . .

§ 15. When the folk heard these words . . . then hasted they to penance, and that with good will, . . . in confessing their sins, in correcting what they had done amiss, . . . in temperance, and in abstaining from dainties, . . . resolved to trample down all bodily vanities, and to embrace the joys of Paradise. Then did they alms, which is the glory of the pitiful, and in patience possessed they their souls, and prayed, saying, 'Forgive us our debts,' . . . dedicating themselves to Christ the Lord. . . .

§ 16. [Alfred's objurgation of illiterate magistrates is here given, from Asser, and his fabulous schools at Oxford, whither he is made to decree that his nobles should send their sons, 'or even their thralls, such as show promise of talent. And if so, let them be free.' 'The University of Oxford was of old outside the North Gate of the city, and the Church of St. Giles-without-the-Gate was that of the clerks. But now it is within the walls, and its church is that of St. Mary. And this change was made in the 28th year of the reign of King Edward, the third after the Conquest,[1] in 1354.']

§ 17. After this the Most Christian King Alfred issued an ordinance to be observed throughout his whole realm, which was called West-Saxona-Laga.[2] And he parted it all into Shires, and the Shires into Hundreds. And these Laws St. Edward [the Confessor], the son of Ethelred and Emma, ratified. . . . And to this day be they called the Laws of St. Edward. . . .

[Here follows a list of early English law terms, with interpretations, in Latin and French. The book goes on to touch on Alfred's literary work, his almsgiving, his devotion, and his lantern. Thence it passes to a very inaccurate account of his early Danish wars, dwelling upon his vision of St. Cuthbert at Athelney, up to the baptism of Guthrum 'whom some call Gordon.']

§ 18. And here must we observe that all the kingdoms in England having been united by Egbert, grandfather of Alfred, . . . stood firm together till the fourth year of Ethelred son of Ethelwulf. In that year did the Mercians, the Northumbrians, the East Angles, and the East Saxons choose to support the enemy. . . . But Alfred, like a second Mattathias, Judas Maccabæus, and Jonathan, fought, for the Faith and his brethren, nine battles in one year against the Danes, who, as yet, were

1 Our current numeration of the Edward's came up in the fourteenth century. In earlier times the three before the Conquest were included, 'the Elder' being Edward I., 'the Martyr' being Edward II., and 'the Confessor' Edward III.

2 This interesting phrase probably refers not to Alfred's Code, but to the popular designation of his immediate kingdom; in opposition to the Danelagh, which comprised all the rest of England.

heathen. And, at the last, by God's aid, his was the victory, and he . . . brought under again all those kingdoms. . . . And Alfred was the first King of England who would suffer no other King in the land save himself alone. Egbert . . . brought under the other kingdoms, yet suffered he their Kings to reign over them. Tribute he made them pay him, but not to lay down their crowns, as . . . Alfred the Conqueror would have them do. . . .

§ 20. [Here comes the appointment of the swineherd Denewulf to the bishopric of Winchester, the Danish raid on Rochester, the restoration of London, the mission to India, the campaigns of 894, Alfred's infirmity, his death, and his Will (in Anglo-Saxon, Latin, and fourteenth-century English).][1]

All things being thus set in order, the most Christian King Alfred, who had fought so many a battle with the Danes; who had bravely and stoutly undergone, for the freedom of his country, so many a danger; . . . who feared not the Prince [of this World]; Alfred, the heroic chieftain, Alfred the rampart of the nation, Alfred the strength of his people, . . . yielded unto death. Illustrious was he, and the dread of all his foes; for on his goings shone the Light of God.

§ 21. His royal corpse was first entombed . . . in the cathedral of Winchester. But afterwards (through the folly of the Canons . . . who gave out that his ghost wandered at night through their dwellings) . . . his son Edward removed his bones and laid them in the New Minster. This was, at that time, hard by the Old Minster. But in the days of that glorious prince, Henry the Elder [*i.e.* the First], it was moved unto Hyde, beyond the northern gate of Winchester. And there now lieth Alfred, of blessed memory . . . having died in the Year of Grace 901.

§ 22. In the same year the aforesaid Edward . . . was crowned King of England at Kingston. Less than his father was he in

[1] This document is generally admitted to be genuine, and is printed by Kemble (Cod. Diplom. cccxiv.). Alfred, after reciting his title to his lands, leaves them amongst his children and kin, those at Guildford and Godalming going to his nephew Ethelbald Clito). To his sons he gives also £500 apiece (equivalent to about £15,000 now), to his daughters £100, and to his widow, Elswitha, who likewise gets Wantage, Lambourne, and Ethandune. Various bequests follow to servants and friends; four Bishops (Asser amongst them) getting 100 mancuses to give in alms 'for me and for my father.' For '50 Mass-priests' are left 100 shillings, and as much between the poor and 'the church of my burial.' Any bondsmen to whom he may have granted freedom [*cyrelif*] are to remain free churls. 'And let all men seek, with a lively Sacrifice [*on cwicum ceape*], for the health of my soul.'

Letters, but greater in renown, . . . for he brought under the Kings of Scotland, Cumberland and Wales to his sway. . . . This King had his sons instructed in Letters; but his daughters, when their schooling was done, set he to ply the spindle-whorl[1] and the needle.

1 The spindle-whorl was a small round object, of stone or bone, pierced with a hole, and used by the Anglo-Saxon women as a flywheel for their spindles. It continued in use till the sixteenth century. (See Bridgett's "Life of Sir Thomas More," p. 449.)

XIV.

THE CHRONICLE OF ST. NEOT'S.

[COMMONLY CALLED 'THE ANNALS OF ASSER.']

THIS Chronicle, like those of Hyde and Crowland, is of unknown authorship, and owes its name to a Religious House, the Abbey of St. Neot's in Huntingdonshire, where the only known MS. was found by Leland, the great archæologist of the early sixteenth century. This MS. came into the hands of Archbishop Parker, and is now in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge, inscribed in his handwriting *Annales Io. Asser.*

For Parker attributed this Chronicle to Asser, and interpolated numerous extracts from it into his edition of Asser's 'Deeds of Alfred'; (in which he has been followed by all subsequent editors of that work). Asser's, however, it most assuredly is not; being a conglomerate from many sources, known and unknown, by a compiler with a keen eye for the historical picturesque. He has thus preserved for us some of the most widely popular scenes in English History, such as the story of Alfred and the Cakes, which have been freely copied again and again by subsequent writers. Those thus borrowed by the Chroniclers already given in the present work will be found under their names, (with the acknowledgments which they failed to make given in the footnotes), as well as those incorporated by Parker into Asser. Only their places are indicated here, and the residuum which is actually quoted consists mostly of singularly beautiful extracts drawn by the Chronicler from the 10th Century 'Passion of St. Edmund' by Abbo of Fleury. The Chronicle appears to have been compiled during the latter half of the 11th Century, and our MS. is not much later.

THE CHRONICLE OF ST. NEOT'S.

§ 1. [The chronicler's first entry during Alfred's lifetime is of the Danish invasion of 851; the battle of Wembury 'against the Heathen Norsemen [*Nordimannos*] or Danes'; their wintering 'in the Isle called Sheppey'; their sack of London, 'a city on the march of Essex and Middlesex, but in very truth pertaining to Essex'; and their crushing defeat at Ockley. All is from Asser, as is also the notice, which follows, of Alfred's journey to Rome, his father's wedding, and the story of Edburgh.

From Asser, too, come the transactions of the reigns of Ethelbald and Ethelbert, the Danish conquest of Northumbria, and the siege of Nottingham.]

§ 2. In the year 856, the second of the Emperor Charles III., and the third of the reign of Ethelwulf King of the West Saxons, did Humbert, the Bishop of East Anglia, anoint and hallow to King the Most Glorious Edmund, with all joy and honour, in the Royal Town which is called Burna [Bures in Suffolk], because it was then the seat of Royalty, in the 15th year of his age, on Friday, the 25th day of the month, being Christmas Day.

* * * * *

§ 3. In the year of our Lord's Incarnation, 870, there suffered St.[1] Edmund, King of the East Angles, most holy and acceptable unto God. Edmund, sprung from the high-born stock of the ancient Saxons, was, from his earliest years, the truest of Christians. Offspring of the Kings of old [*atavis editus regibus*], he showed himself of such promise that, by the unanimous goodwill of all his fellow-countrymen, he was—not so much chosen by right of birth, as—rushed into supreme power and kingship over them. For his very look was worthy of this high estate; so bright was it with the calm beauty of holiness, and of a conscience like the sea at rest. Kind he was of speech and courteous to all; the grace of humility came natural to him; and amongst his own comrades he kept his place [*residebat*] as their Lord, with wondrous meekness, and no touch of pride. For already the Saint bare in his face that which he was afterwards, by God's will, to show forth; seeing that as a boy he had pressed, with all his might, into the Way of Righteousness, which, as God's pity foreknew, would end for him in the Way of Martyrdom.

1 Edmund was at once canonized by popular acclamation immediately after his death. He is already called 'Saint' on coins of Guthrum (*i.e.* before 890). His famous Abbey was founded 926.

§ 4. And when the Blessed Edmund reached the kingship, such was his goodness to his subjects, such his strict justice towards evil-doers, that he may not declare it, for it is far beyond any words of ours. For so did he temper the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove, that no deceit of the Old Enemy might blind him; nor would he accept the unjust sentences of wicked men; for that which he knew not, with all diligence sought he out. And walking in the King's Highway [*Via Regia*], he turned aside neither to the right hand, by being puffed up with his own merits, nor to the left, by yielding to the faults of human weakness. To the needy, moreover, was he a cheerful giver, to widows and orphans the kindest of Patrons; ever keeping before his eyes the saying of the Wise Man, 'Behold, they have made thee Prince: be not up-lifted; but be thou amongst them even as one of themselves.'

§ 5. And seeing that he shone out, in Christ and His Church, with such brightness of good deeds, the Enemy of mankind (who, being himself void of goodwill, grudgeth, all the more, at the good) drew nigh to make trial of his patience, as of the holy Job. Therefore raised he up one of his [Satan's] members as an adversary against him, to strip him bare on every side, if perchance hē might provoke him to break out into impatience, and, in his despair, to curse God to His face. And this same adversary was by name Ingwar; who, with another, called Hubba, a fellow of like perversity, strove (had not God's mercy hindered) utterly to exterminate every province in Britain. . . . Neither could any man in any province stop or stay their misdeeds, for by the well-deserved wrath of God grew they and multiplied, and Hubba was the minister of His justice. . . . Craftily would he steal into a city, and, ere the townsfolk knew it, give all to the flames. Boys and men, old and young, did this cut-throat hew down in the open street, and of the honour of matron and maiden made he mock. There lay husband and wife, dead or dying, together on their own threshold; and, to heighten the horror, the babe snatched from the mother's bosom was slaughtered before the mother's eyes.

§ 6. And when now by multitudinous massacre he had, not indeed satiated his achæmenian [1] ravening, but deferred it, through fatigue,

[1] This curious phrase seems to be an allusion to the story of Cyrus, son of Achæmenes, whose bloodthirstiness forms the subject of a well-known classical legend.

to the morrow, he called certain plebeians, whom he thought unworthy of his sword, and diligently inquired of them where their King might, as then, be living, which was at a place called in their own tongue *Hegelisdum* [Halstead].

§ 7. Then did that most wicked Chieftain send to St. Edmund a messenger, and bade him fearlessly and without greeting to address him in this wise; 'Hingwar, my Lord and thy Lord, the all unconquered King, the master of many a realm, has now thought good to land on this shore and here to winter. Wherefore he biddeth thee share with him the treasure-hoard of thy House. So shall thou still reign,—under him. But if thou, to thine own hurt [*præjudicio*] dost scorn his power . . . . he will doom thee as unworthy either to reign or to live.'

§ 8. At this did the Royal Saint groan for deep sorrow of heart, and said to the messenger: 'The Almighty Judge of all things is my witness, that, whether in death or life, none shall separate me from the love of Christ. The trothplight [*annulum*] of His Faith took I on in the confession of Baptism, to renounce the Devil and all his pomps. And thereby was I found worthy to be hallowed to the praise and glory of the Eternal Trinity, and that in three fold wise, being anointed with Holy Chrism unto everlasting life. First when at the Font I received the garment of Salvation; secondly in the yet higher sealing [*majusculo signaculo*] of the Bishop at Confirmation; thirdly when, by the common acclaim of all my people, I took up the duties of my Kingship. And, thus triply bedewed with the unction of mystic hallowing, have I vowed rather to serve than sway [*prodesse quam præesse*] the commonwealth of England [*Anglorum reipublicæ*], and scorn to bow me beneath any yoke save that of God's service only.'

§ 9. Edmund's martyrdom is given as in Roger of Wendover (§ 9), with an elaborate comparison of his passion to that of our Lord. The finding of his head is also as in Roger.

[Next follow the invasion of Wessex, the Battles of Reading and Ashdown, the death of Ethelred, the accession of Alfred, the Battle of Wilton, and the Danish evacuation of Wessex, all from Asser. From him too we have their conquest of Mercia and Northumbria, and their seizing of Cambridge, Wareham and Exeter.]

§ 10. This same year [873] on the Feast of St. Luke did Rollo and his men invade Normandy. Now this Rollo, Duke of the

Normans, whilst he was wintering in Old Britain, or England, with his gang, one night had a dream, right soon to be fulfilled in its season.

§ 11. Him thought as he slept that a swarm of bees took wing over him and his host and hummed off westward over the Mid Sea, and so came to land. And there did they settle in swarms on divers trees, and ere long all the land brake out into flowerets of many a hue, as if to welcome the new comers.

§ 12. Here woke Rollo and thought on that dream and the interpretation thereof. And when he had diligently considered the thing, he guessed that he might find rest from his toils in those parts where the bees had settled.

§ 13. And well drew he strength from that fair hope. For in that he saw the whole land burst into blossom, this was the call of the Divine Pity, that he might win that land, and that under him and his children it might glow with the flowers of many a virtue and of true religion.

§ 14. Then did the Chieftain call together his men, and eagerly told his dream, and bade his whole fleet steer on that course whereas the bees had gone. And the High Mercy of God prospered the King, and sent them the needful breeze, and pleasant seas, and pleasant skies.

§ 15. So drew they in to Seine-mouth, and, as they were fain to do, came unto the metropolis, even Rouen. And there wrought they destruction to all who strove with them; but them that yielded themselves and were at one with them took they under their guard and peace.

Whereat the King of France, between fear and favour, made that whole region into a Lordship for the Duke and his Norman, to their sole use and benefit, so that they would own him for their Suzerain with due Service.

§ 16. So did the renowned Duke return to Rouen, and built again the wall thereof. . . . And meanwhile did he oft-times call to him the venerable Archbishop Franco and would speak with him. Thus then was he instructed in the Scriptures of our Divine Religion; and, little by little, began he to delight therein, even as the Holy Spirit moved his heart. Thus at length was he washed in the Sacrament of Regeneration, to the knowledge of God; and all his host in like manner, by his example, brightened

out into white apparel, and took their stand on the Faith. And by his example was his whole host, ere long, born again in Christ; and in their white baptismal garments made they a glorious show, standing steadfast in the Faith.

§ 17. Then did the glorious Duke, for love of the Christian Faith cause to repair the Churches and Minsters that were burnt, and to bring back the relics of the Saints which had been hidden away for dread of him and his, . . . that he might have their intercession with God who hallowed them unto Himself. So did he take due care for all, as a good Christian [*Christicola*]; so did he rule over all, as a kind father.

§ 18. [The overrunning of Wessex in 878 by the Danes is given from Asser and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, with the interesting translation of 'Twelfth Night' into the Greek *Theophania*.

Next we come to the story of the Cakes (transcribed into Asser), of which this Chronicle is the earliest extant source.

The Danish defeat in Devon comes next, verbatim from Asser, but the story of the Raven Banner (Asser, § 60) is due to this Chronicler, who then copies from Asser the English rising and Alfred's march to Acglea.]

§ 19. 'And there he encamped one night, and in that night when he had fallen asleep there showed unto him an apparition [*effigies*] in the likeness of St. Neot, erst his own dear friend and kinsman, and bade him "Cast away all fear and dread of the barbarians, neither be of faint heart because of their multitude. For to-morrow will the Lord visit thee and thy people, seeing that for the arrogance of thy youth hast thou suffered all this trouble. Yea, to-morrow," added he, "will I go on all day long before thy banners, that the more surely thou mayest fight against thy foes, fearing nought; and mayest know that the Lord Almighty fighteth for thee and for thy people." Thereupon up woke the King, gladdened indeed by the heavenly vision.'

§ 20. [The baptism of Guthrum, the Peace of Wedmore, the Danish invasion of Gaul, and Alfred's rebuilding of London, follow as in Asser. After this the Chronicler dwells upon a remarkable vision of Purgatory beheld and told by the Emperor Charles III.; wherein, guided by an angel with a shining clue, he sees wordly-minded ecclesiastics immersed in pits of scalding pitch, sulphur, lead, wax, and grease. The wrong-doing laity were plunged in molten metal; and his own predecessors on the throne in boiling water, amongst them his father, who says to him:

'For our sins do I and all those whom thou has seen suffer such torments. The one day am I in this boiling bath, but the next in another most sweetly cool. And this

through the prayers of St. Peter and St. Remigius. . . . And if thou and thy faithful Bishops, and Abbots, and churchmen of every degree, wilt but help me with Masses, Oblations, Psalmody, Vigils, Prayers, and Almsdeeds, eftsoon shall I be wholly freed from this vessel of boiling water. For my brother Lothair and his son Louis . . . are already thus freed from these pains and brought to the Paradise of God.' Then said he to me 'Look to the left.' And when I looked I beheld two very deep baths of boiling water. 'These,' said he, 'are being made ready for thee thyself, unless thou mendest thy ways and repentest of thine accursed sins.']

§ 21. [The campaigns of 893 and the following years are abridged from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, with the additional touch that Hasting and his followers in the end 'were fain to cross again the sea, without money and without honour.']

And in 900 the death of Alfred is recorded, with the splendid encomium, a translation of which will be found at the end of Asser.

ANNO DCCCC ALFREDUS VERIDICUS VIR IN BELLO PER OMNIA STRENUISSIMUS, REX OCCIDENTALIUM SAXONUM NOBILISSIMUS, PRUDENS VERO ET RELIGIOSUS ATQUE SAPIENTISSIMUS, HOC ANNO, CUM MAGNO SUORUM DOLORE, VIAM UNIVERSITATIS ADIIT, DIE VII KAL. NOVEM., ANNO REGNI SUI XXIX ET DIMIDIO, ANNO VERO ÆTATIS SUÆ LI. QUI APUD WINTONIAM CIVITATEM REGALEM DECENTER ET REGALI HONORE EST SEPULTUS. MAUSOLEUM QUOQUE IPSIUS CONSTAT FACTUM DE MARMORE PORPHYRIO PRETIOSISSIMO.

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